SPECIAL ISSUE

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THE GOLDEN YEARS OF RAILROADING

From the Editors of TRAINS Magazine

Fall 2006
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Mail by Rail

The fast trains and elite crews of the Railway Mail Service

Mail car clerks: a tough, proud breed

CB&Q's *Fast Mail*, by David P. Morgan

Steinheimer photos: SP mail pickup

How a letter crossed the U.S. in 1947

Slinging mailbags on the Pennsy

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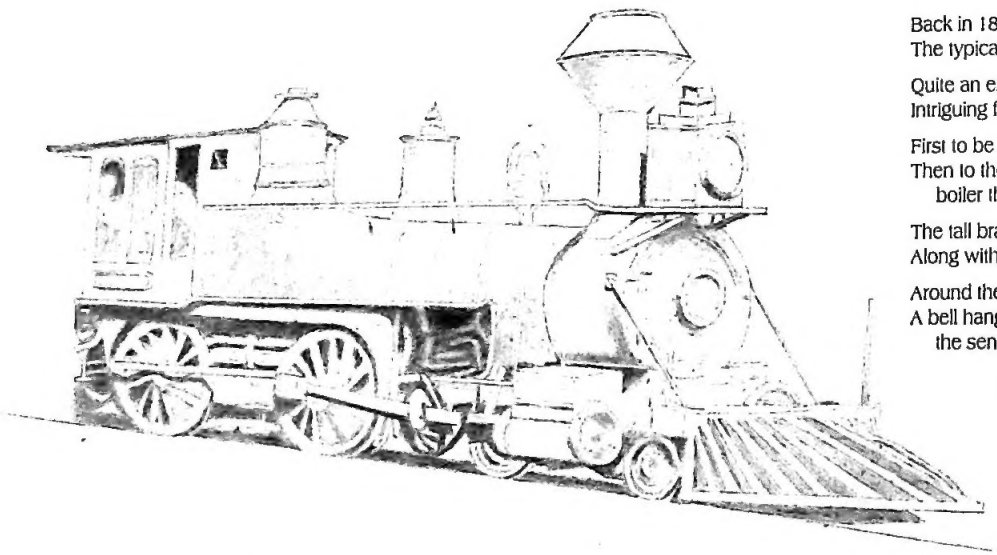
Vol. 7, Issue 3

Dedicated in loving memory to my mother,

Dorothy M. Segal,

For your inspiration and encouragement.

Diane S. Segal



American Type 4-4-0

Back in 1875 long ago
The typical locomotive was the American type 4-4-0

Quite an engineering marvel it was to contemplate
Intriguing features were used to decorate

First to be noted is the finial-topped sand dome
Then to the brass straps around the finely tapered boiler the eye does roam

The tall brass candlesticks are impressive too
Along with the gothic cab to hold the crew

Around the drivers can be found solid mud fenders
A bell hanger and plain headlight bracket identify the senders.

Diane S. Segal

4-4-0

Between the two years 1886 to 1888
There was a certain company and a lease it did create

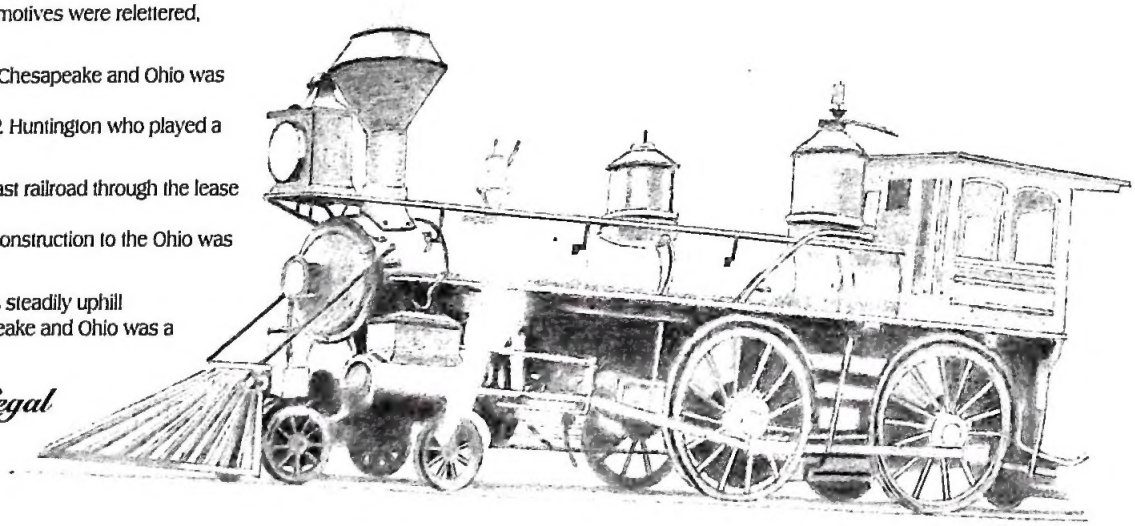
It was the Newport News and Mississippi Valley Company which leased the C&O
Some of the C&O locomotives were relettered, including a 4-4-0

During early times the Chesapeake and Ohio was under the control
Of the financier Collis P. Huntington who played a great role

To create a coast-to-coast railroad through the lease was his vision
Completing the C&O's construction to the Ohio was his decision

This sturdy 4-4-0 climbs steadily uphill
Working on the Chesapeake and Ohio was a true thrill.

Diane S. Segal



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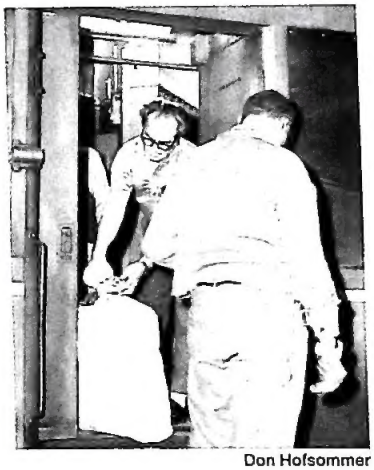
N.Y. & WASH. TR 3 JUN 30 1977 R.P.O.
MAIL BY Rail

Editor's Page

Final night for the Fast Mail

Nearly three decades ago, on a sultry summer midnight, a few dozen people were assembled on a lower-level platform at 30th Street Station, Philadelphia. We were not there to board a train, but to witness the arrival and departure of two trains—and the end of an era. The trains headed our way as June 30, 1977, slipped into July 1, one from New York, the other from Washington, were Conrail Nos. 3 and 4. They carried the very last Railway Post Offices, making their final runs.

The New York & Washington had held the title of last RPO line for just over six years, when the few others that had made it to May 1, 1971, ended with the inception of Amtrak. "The Wash Line" stayed on to continue nightly service between the nation's capital and its largest city. Costs, not service, doomed the line, the Postal Service said.



Don Hofsommer

Workers load mail aboard an RPO in PC train 4 at Washington Union Station in 1972, five years before the final run.

First to arrive, at 12:15 a.m., was No. 4 (or 194 to Amtrak, which operated the trains for Conrail), looking much as it had in recent years: A black GG1 electric (Amtrak 901), pulling two timeworn B60 baggage cars for storage mail (one in Penn Central livery, the other still in Pennsylvania paint), two PC BM85 RPO's, and an Amtrak rider coach. Inside the mail cars, men with revolvers on their hips sorted the final few letters of the countless billions handled by the Railway Mail Service over its long, proud history.

No. 4 moved out at 12:50, and 27 minutes later No. 3 (Amtrak 193), *the* last Railway Post Office train, rolled in from New York. GG1 4935 (restored to PRR pinstripes a month and a half earlier) headed two B60's and two ancient BM70's (all in fresh PC livery, of all things), plus a snack-coach. When 4935 pulled out at 1:35, it took a piece of railroad history with it.

Robert S. McGonigal

ClassicTrains
THE GOLDEN YEARS OF RAILROADING

Fall 2006 • Volume 7 Number 3

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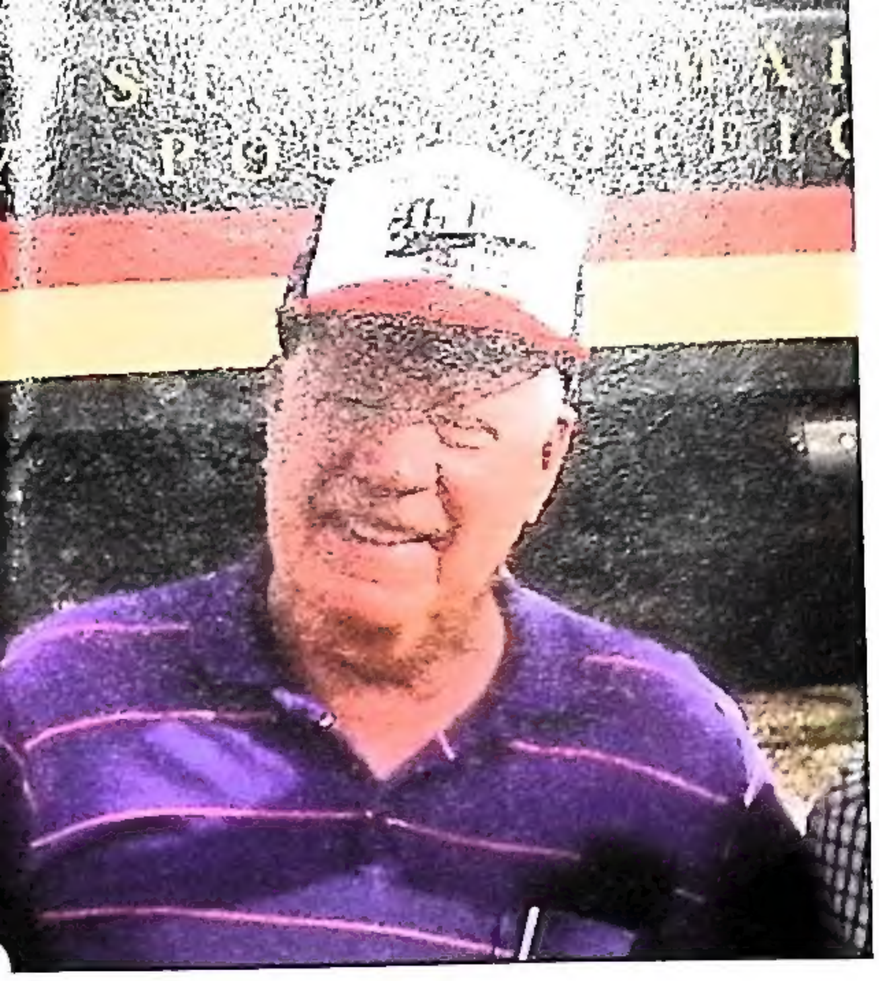
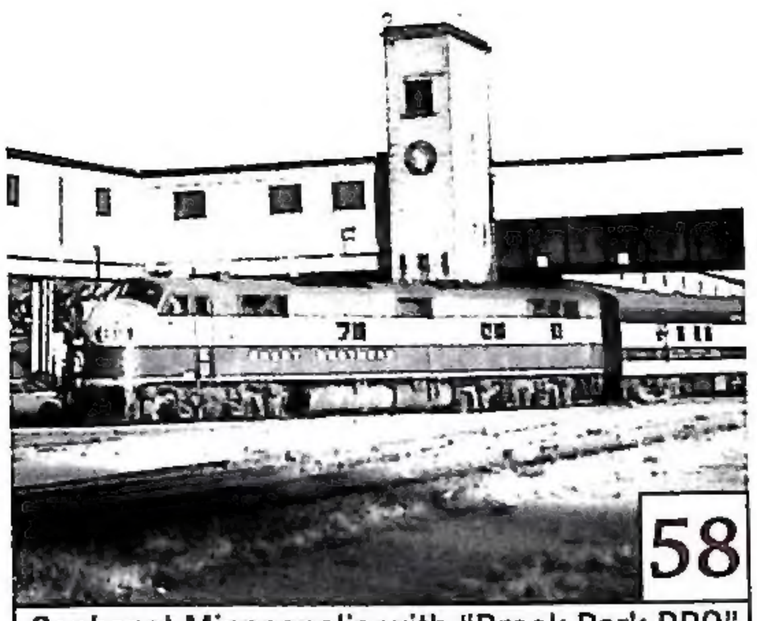
On the Cover: Great Northern's westbound train 27, the *Fast Mail*, nears Belton, Mont., western gateway to Glacier National Park, in a black-and-white photo for Rail Photo Service by Frank McKinlay. Photo illustration work by Thomas G. Danneman.



Even Pennsy M.U. electrics handled the mail



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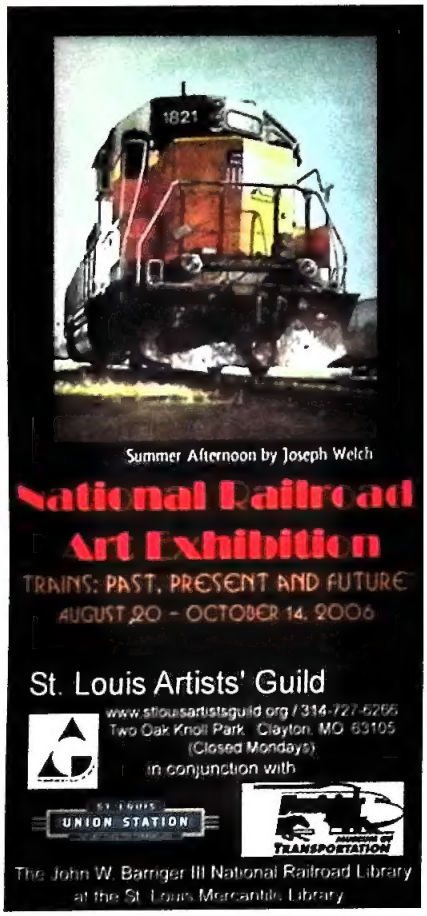
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Contributors

Peter A. Hansen ["The Few, the Proud," pages 32-41] is a freelance writer living near Kansas City. This is his second CLASSIC TRAINS byline; he also had articles in two of our Special Editions, DREAM TRAINS and STREAMLINER PIONEERS.

Don L. Hofsommer ["Racing into History," pages 58-65], is a Professor of History at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota and head of the Lexington Group in Transportation History. He's written extensively on American railroad history, including major books on the Southern Pacific, Katy, and Minneapolis & St. Louis; his most recent book, *Steel Trails of Hawkeyeland*, covers the railroads of Iowa, his native state [see "Ready Track" on page 108 of this issue]. His two previous CLASSIC TRAINS articles, in Summer 2000 and Spring 2004, were on the M&StL.

William W. Kratville ["All Roads (Nearly) Led to the Transfer," page 31] is a native of Omaha, where he now lives with his wife, Anita. He has had a varied career, mostly in and around the railroad industry. Bill's first job, in 1946, was as a Milwaukee Road hostler's helper at Council Bluffs. Since then he has been, among other things, assistant to the mayor of Omaha, a railroad book author, a private car owner and operator, chief photographer for Amtrak (which he helped get started with his Auto-Liner, Inc., rail car company), and a consultant to railroad companies. Bill was with the Union Pacific Museum from 1991 to 2005. He wrote about UP 4-8-4's for our 2004 Special Edition, STEAM GLORY, but this is his first byline in CLASSIC TRAINS proper.

David P. Morgan ["Fast Mail," pages 20-31] was editor of TRAINS magazine from 1953 to 1987. He died in 1990. One of the most prolific and influential railroad authors ever, "DPM" is the most-quoted source in Andrew Dow's new book, *Dow's Dictionary of Railway Quotations* [see "Ready Track" on page 108 of this issue].

Bert Pennypacker ["Tales from a Coatesville Mail Helper," pages 50-55] has been writing books and articles about railroading for nearly 50 years. Born in Philadelphia in 1923, he lived in Coatesville from about 1930 to 1953, when he returned to Philly for good. This is Bert's eighth byline in CLASSIC TRAINS.

J. W. Schultz ["Pride of the CB&Q," page 28] is a Chicagoland native who went railroading at age 16 as a Milwaukee Road summertime extra-gang track laborer. During college, John worked as a switchman and brakeman in Wisconsin and Illinois, again with the Milwaukee. Following college and completion of military service (Lieutenant, Army Corps of Engineers), he joined the Missouri Pacific as a management trainee, and spent 27 years with MP and Union Pacific as a field operating officer. Recently, he joined the Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway as vice president-transportation. John has completed a multi-volume manuscript of the history of the Burlington Route's *Zephyrs*, now awaiting publication. This is his first CLASSIC TRAINS byline.

Richard Steinheimer ["Mrs. Adkins Meets No. 51," pages 42-47] is, quite rightly, one of the most celebrated railroad photographers of all time. He lives in Sacramento with his wife, Shirley Burman. This is Dick's fourth piece in CLASSIC TRAINS, including a "Great Photographers" article about him in Winter 2004.

John Taibi ["O&W: Endearing and Quaint, but Doomed," pages 16-19], who lives in the former New York, Ontario & Western depot in Munnsville, N.Y., is an authority on the beloved fallen flag road. This is his first byline in CLASSIC TRAINS.

Ed Theisinger ["Big Emmas over the Red River," pages 73-77] is retired from a career with Allied Chemical & Dye. He has contributed many photos to CLASSIC TRAINS, but this is only his second byline, following "Fantrip Fun on the Fonda, Johnstown & Gloversville" in our Summer 2004 issue. A native of Long Island, Ed now lives near Lynchburg, Va.

David A. Thompson ["Night Train Stowaway," pages 66-69, and "Boston-Seattle for 3 Cents," pages 70-72] is a retired U.S. Navy officer living in Bloomington, Minn. He dedicates his "Night Train" article to the memory of his father, RMS Foreman Arne Thompson, and his mother, Hilma Thompson. (Dave is pictured above with the letter case his father used to practice sorting at home.) He thanks Frank Scheer, curator of the Railway Mail Service Library, for his help with "Boston-Seattle." These are Dave's first bylines in CLASSIC TRAINS.

A. J. Wolff ["One Day at . . . North Platte, Nebr.," pages 92-93] has been interested in the Union Pacific since he witnessed Big Boys challenging Sherman Hill at a young age. Living in Cheyenne and now semi-retired, Jack has had numerous photographs published, authored two books, and written several articles in publications related to the UP. This is his first CLASSIC TRAINS byline.

Karl Zimmermann ["Snag that Bag!" pages 56-57], a New York area resident, is a longtime, prolific contributor to rail magazines, as well as the author of numerous books. This is his seventh byline with us, including three stories in our annual Special Editions. ■

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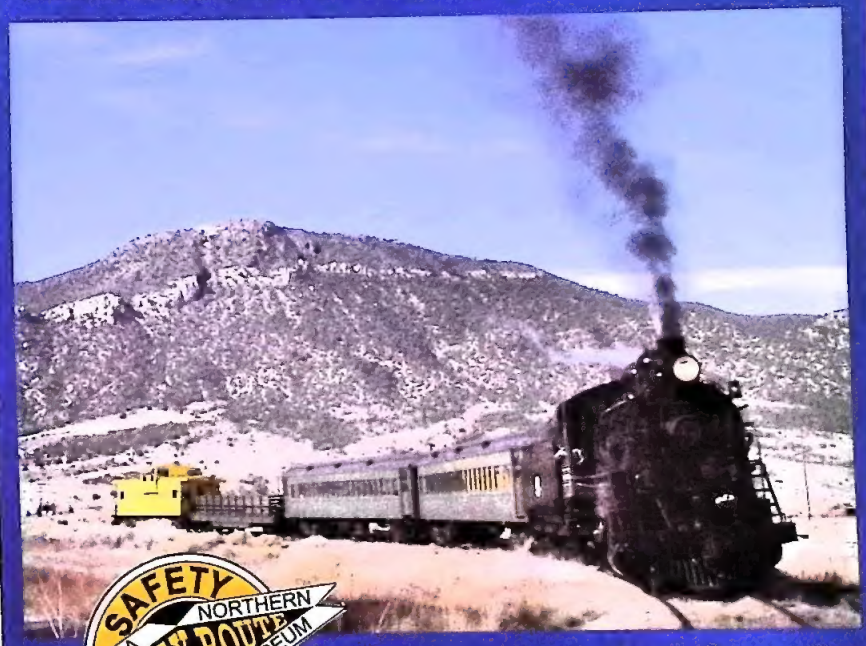

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True Color

Huddle at Iaeger

Engineer and official confer below the cab of Norfolk & Western J-class 4-8-4 611 during a farewell-to-steam excursion on October 24, 1959. The trip is running from Roanoke, Va., to Williamson, W.Va., with a stop on the way west here at Iaeger, W.Va., so the fans on-board can get off and inspect several Y-6 2-8-8-2's, which are working out their final months in mine-run service. The 611 is standing on the Dry Fork Branch, onto which she backed her train to get closer to the engine terminal. Soon, with all back aboard, 611 will be on the main line again, giving the fans a taste of what N&W passenger service was like before diesels came—and foreshadowing her second career, as an excursion engine, in the 1980's and '90's.

John Dziobko

Remembering B&O's 2-10-2's

Bert Pennypacker's "B&O's Big Sixes" [pages 22-29, Summer] brought back fond memories. Those engines were awesome. I worked as a brakeman on the Baltimore Division's "East End" out of Philadelphia in the 1940's and ran to Brunswick, Md., over the Old Main Line, called the "Dog Knot." When we had a heavy train eastbound, we'd stop east of Point of Rocks and a Big Six helper would come up behind to shove us over the hill and Mt. Airy, and would cut off on the fly. When those boys would tie on, they'd open the throttle to "bunch the slack" and wait for the head end to move after they whistled off. The hack, as we called the caboose, would creak and groan, and I worried it would collapse. It never happened to me, but it did to another crew with a wooden hack.

Paul J. Oliver, Coral Springs, Fla.

Those beautiful B&O "Big Sixes" pulled the troop train which brought me home from a year of World War II combat in Europe (with nary a scratch). After docking at New York on the *Aquitania*, we ferried across the Hudson to New Jersey, where we boarded our first train, behind a Pennsy GG1, to Camp Kilmer. We were processed for a few days and divided for our destinations, mine being Camp McCoy, Wis., since my home then was Madison. We boarded a train in early evening, I think behind a Reading 2-8-2. Next morning we were in Cumberland, Md., and heading into beautiful mountains, paralleling a river.

On the other side was, I soon learned, the Western Maryland, as a shiny 2-8-0 passed on a freight. As we went around curves I could see our power: double-headed B&O 2-10-2's, working hard at hauling our 20-plus cars upgrade. We finished the day near Chicago, and after bedding down for the night, I heard someone say we were passing through the Milwaukee Road depot in Milwaukee. By noon the next day our two heavy USRA 2-8-2's brought us into McCoy.

Frank Rogers, Silver City, N.Mex.

In the photo on page 28 at Hyndman, my hometown, you can see—through the depot—the end of the Railway Express wagon I used for large loads of mail and milk cans, between June 1952 and May 1953, during my senior year at Hyndman High when I had the job of handling the mail since there was no station agent on duty. I used the small cart, at right in the photo, to haul the mail that had arrived the previous evening on 32, a mail train with one rider coach. About 2 a.m., a B&O employee from the helper terminal would put the sack of first class mail in the depot that was tossed off train 10; I had to have this mail at the post office by 8 a.m. About 1 p.m., I would hang a mail sack for pickup, on the fly, by train 8. While waiting to put the day's accumulated mail on train 32, which would show up after 6:30 p.m., I'd watch the "Big Sixes" and 7600's [EM-1's] pull up to the station and take water while helpers were attached to the rear of their trains.

Lynn K. Winters Sr., Cumberland, Md.

Rem Hunnewell

Where once CNJ and Reading trains scurried about, today it's the quiet of Liberty State Park.

I loved the Summer issue featuring B&O's "Big Sixes," but I have seen what appears to be a minor error. On page 26, the listing of Q-1 and Q-1b class B&O Mikados appears to be incorrect. Should the road numbers read 4000-4209 instead of 4000-4129? B&O acquired 210 of these Baldwins.

Ken Long, King George, Va.

¶ We had the quantity right but the number series wrong. It should have been 4000-4159 and 4170-4219.—R.S.M.

In early fall 1956 I was a student at Central Catholic High School, near Panther Hollow and the B&O main line in Pittsburgh. The big Santa Fes were still active, pulling and pushing freights between Connellsville and New Castle. I would listen to them working coal while in Brother Leo's second-year algebra class right after lunch. With the classroom windows open, the good Brother's voice was no match for the Big Sixes—what an impediment to learning.

Jim Young, Augusta, Ga.

Peace and quiet in New Jersey

The photo in "Bumping Post" ["Anteroom for Lower Manhattan," page 98] of the Central Railroad of New Jersey's Jersey City Terminal inspired me. Above is a current photo of the terminal from approximately the same location.

Rem Hunnewell, Oakhurst, N.J.

From Spokane to the Adirondacks

The picture on page 72 of Spokane, Portland & Seattle C424 314 ["One Day at . . . Spokane, Wash." by J. David Ingles] caught my eye, but reading the caption *really* got my attention, for trailing the 314 is 303. I've ridden on that locomotive! She is now doing admirable duty on the Adirondack Scenic Railroad as No. 4243. When I rode her she was covering the Lake Placid-Saranac Lake runs.

Larry Girard, Depauville, N.Y.

The Spartan Soo Line

I read Tom Murray's "Learning the Basics on the B&M and the Soo" [pages 50-57] with interest. He said, "Every piece of equipment . . . was as Spartan as could be." I'll say! In the early 1960's when I worked in the Long Island Rail Road's passenger department, I lined up half-rate orders and headed for western Canada on vacation, via Pennsy to Chi-

cago and Milwaukee's *Morning Hiawatha* to St. Paul, in the Skytop parlor observation. At St. Paul Union Depot, upon presenting the rate order to the Soo and finding no lower berths were available on the *Winnipeger*, I settled for an upper.

This was a railroad-operated sleeping car; somewhere I have the stub for the "Soo Line Sleeping Car Company." Carrying the markers was an old section car, minimally modernized with bedrooms at one end. The batteries were low, and dim yellow lights overhead were flickering on the undulating berth curtains as we crept along. Half the buttons on the berth curtains were missing, and I discovered in my upper that the bulb was missing from the light! The night's sleep was comfortable enough, but when I awakened, we were stopped . . . at Thief River Falls, Minn., in broad daylight. The conductor told me we'd been held an hour and a half for a freight!

This presented a problem, as I was to connect with the triweekly Mack railcar of the Greater Winnipeg Water District Railway. Our crew was friendly enough (though no admirers of Soo President Len Murray), and arranged to drop me off at CP's St. Boniface yard office, near GWWD's station. I made my connection, so all was well. I'm sure many would be happy to ride in such a conveyance today, but the *Winnipeger* was the all-time worst intercity train I've ever ridden.

Carl V. Ehrke, Belleville, Ont.

Timeless photo is the "rule"

Joe Thompson's fine photo [page 48, "Photo Section"] of the Santa Fe motor train at Rule, Texas, evokes the 1940's even though taken in 1957. Its lighting, clarity, and activity are all "first class." Given the train's 2 a.m. departure from San Angelo and allowing an over-the-road speed of about 40 mph for the 137.3 miles to Rule, I would estimate the photo was taken around 6:30. Phil Hastings' photo, opposite, at Columbus Union Station [page 49] gives us a rare glimpse of a facility seldom seen in Kalmbach publications. A comprehensive article of that facility, which served B&O, C&O, NYC, N&W, and PRR, is long overdue.

David Bigford, Lake Bluff, Ill.

¶ You're close on the time at Rule, David; train 46 was due there at 6:52.—J.D.I.

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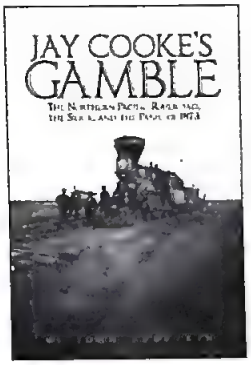

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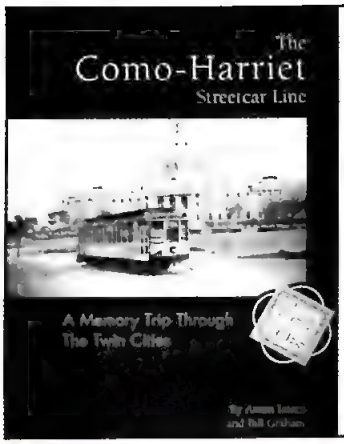

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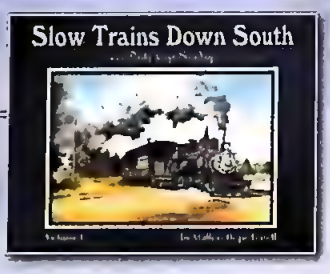

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Fast Mail

CN Mountain home on the prairie

Canadian National 4-8-2 6060 ["South of the Border . . ." pages 8-9, in "True Color"] doesn't belong to the Central Western, but to the Rocky Mountain Railway Society. CN donated it to Alberta province in 1980, which kept it at the Alberta Railway Museum in Edmonton for a while. It was in North Vancouver, B.C., for work after Steam Expo in 1986, then bounced around in storage back in Alberta. The province transferred the engine to the society, which keeps it in the Warden-Stettler area, and operates it from time to time, at 10 mph, on the Alberta Prairie Railroad.

John Godfrey, Montreal, Que.

The boat visible in my slides of CN 6060 at Windsor belonged to the Canada Steamship Lines, not Columbia Transportation. In the slide I kept, the whole boat is visible, showing the red-and-white CSL colors on the stack. It is a self-unloader, probably the *Quetico*.

Dennis Smolinski, Macomb Twp., Mich.

Steaming across Lake Superior

Don Wood's great photo of Canadian Pacific 4-6-2 1271 and its steamship *Keewatin* ["Photo Section," pages 44-45] brought back memories. In September 1948, Dad took Mom and me along on an extended business trip to western Canada, removing me from Grade 5 for two months. We arrived—in our 1947 Chevy business coupe with no back seat—at Port McNicoll in mid-afternoon and boarded *Keewatin*'s sister boat *Assiniboia*, car and all, for Fort William. There were only about 10 other passengers on board, so we were really pampered. Next day, the Second Officer gave me a guided tour of the vessel. These fine ships, while built in Scotland, were too large for the St. Lawrence and Welland canals, so after sailing the Atlantic they were cut in two at Montreal and towed to Buffalo for re-assembly. To its credit, CPR kept these ships immaculate and the service level high right up to the end.

Clayton Morgan, Bowmansville, Ont.

I was surprised and delighted to see the picture that has been in my mind for many years, on pages 44-45, the beautiful photo of CP's *S.S. Keewatin* and 4-6-2 1271. As a student working to earn

money for school, I spent three summers aboard the *Keewatin* and have many fond memories of those times. Thanks!

Tom Savary, Morewood, Ont.

Speed not dependent on voltage

Much as I enjoyed Mac Sebree's fine précis of Pacific Electric ["PE: Largest Interurban, Big-Time Business," pages 16-19, "Fallen Flags Remembered"], I must set right a misleading sentence therein. Mac is rightfully perceived as a traction expert, so left uncorrected, this statement may become "received wisdom" for future generations.

The electrification of the San Bernardino line at 1,200 volts, vs. the 600 volts used elsewhere on PE, is irrelevant to the fact that this line enjoyed higher operating speeds. The 600-volt cars can run just as fast as 1,200-volt cars; some of the interurban lines with the highest operating speeds were 600-volt systems —North Shore Line, Indiana Railroad, Cincinnati & Lake Erie, and Galveston-Houston Electric are examples. The main benefit of a 1,200-volt system over the more common 600 is the reduced capital and operational cost inherent in a less expensive infrastructure, primarily accomplished by the fewer substations required with 1,200-volt power. Speed is *not* an issue.

Dwight Long, Angola, Del.

I so enjoyed Mac Sebree's PE article. I vividly remember, after moving to the Pasadena area, the "Oak Knoll" and the short line to Los Angeles. On a few occasions riding my favorite, Oak Knoll, the motorman asked my mother if I would like to ride in the cab with him. Try and stop me! I got to blow the whistle and ring the bell on those wonderful 1100-class cars.

Frank Williams, Independence, Calif.

Erie Lackawanna connections

Regarding "Arkansas Army Days," by Louis A. Marre [pages 62-71] with the photos from Bob Collins, I worked with Bob for many years on the Erie Lackawanna New York Division in the Hoboken train dispatchers' office. Bob would tell us stories of his exploits in Belgium during World War II, one of which involved an ammunition train that had arrived after dark in a Belgian freight yard. The GI railroaders (Bob included) proceeded to back the ammunition train into the yard using burning fusees. The Belgian crew, seeing the fusees, jumped off the train and ran for the bomb shelters as the nightly Luftwaffe bombing runs were due in. The train was yarded without incident just ahead of the German bombers.

As far as the "Foreigners at Bensenville . . . and Beyond," by Art Danz [pages 80-82 in "The Way it Was"], is concerned,

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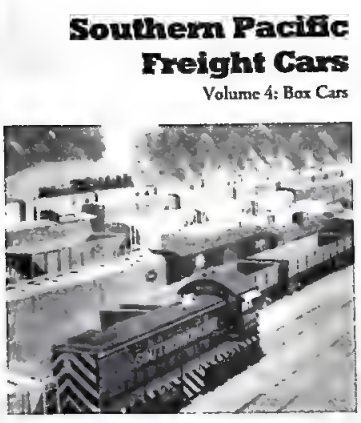

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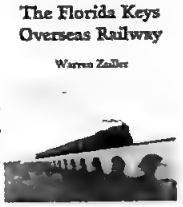

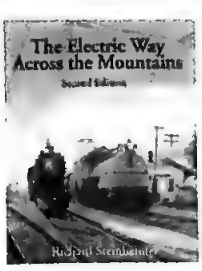

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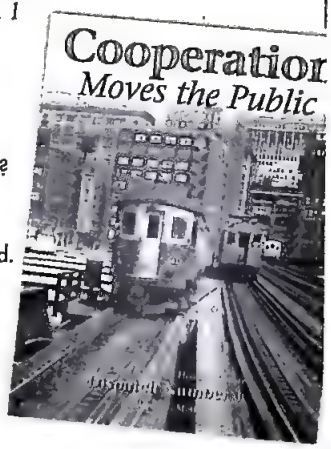

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Fast Mail

I was second-trick Assistant Chief Dispatcher in Hoboken during the early and mid-1970's, and I remember those Milwaukee GP40's being on EL's New York Division. I had two on westbound freight HB-3 one evening, and they stalled across Dover interlocking, tying up the passenger station and storage yard. Those units were nothing but trouble, and they were boomeranging back and forth between Jersey City and Hornell despite the Chiefs of the Hoboken and Susquehanna divisions trying to get rid of them. The last I saw of them, they were dead-in-tow on NY-97 heading for Chicago.

Arthur J. Erdman, Passaic, N.J.

Is that Dad in the RPO door?

My brother and I really appreciated the photo on page 98 ["Bumping Post"] of Spring CLASSIC TRAINS, labeled "August in Augusta," showing Georgia Railroad train 2 coming into the Augusta (Ga.) station. Three men are in the photo, two large and obvious, but also a third, standing the train's RPO car leaning on the catcher arm. Our father was senior mail clerk on the Georgia Road during the last days of Railway Mail Service, having started on the run about 1940. He went to the Atlanta Bulk Mail Terminal as a supervisor when the RPO's came off. Could the man in the photo be our father? You bet. The image is so small we probably will never know, but we thank you for the memory.

Paul Bowen, Manassas, Va.

Summer fixes

- Page 1: The cover photo is captioned incorrectly as engine 6201; it's 6206.
- Page 23: The interlocking at Viaduct Junction in Cumberland, Md., the dividing point of B&O's main lines to St. Louis and Chicago, was ND, not MD, and Chicago trains went straight, not right, while St. Louis trains swung left.
- Page 69: The caption for Frisco engine 4303 says it was a Mikado, but the text below is correct—it's a 4-8-2.
- Page 84, Central Vermont 2-8-0 461 was a class N-5-a, not an M-5-a. ■

Got a comment or correction? Write us at Fast Mail, CLASSIC TRAINS, P.O. Box 1612, Waukesha, WI 53187-1612; e-mail: fastmail@classictrainsmag.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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Fallen Flags Remembered

O&W: Endearing and quaint, but doomed

Obsolete commodities and a weak route structure spelled an early end for the New York, Ontario & Western

I. W. King photo, Joel King collection

In June 1953, just months before passenger service ended, twin F3A's pause with an NYO&W train at the railroad's Middletown, N.Y., depot and operating headquarters.

The New York, Ontario & Western Railway struggled to find its place among the many transportation systems serving New York City, but in the end it was able only to secure a place in history as the first Class 1 railroad to be abandoned in entirety. Despite this unenviable status, "the O&W," as it was known, did endear itself to the communities along its line, as well as to several generations of citizens who rooted for this railroad underdog. After all, it was the carrier that had brought boxcars full of prosperity to every community along the line during its 76-year life.

Begun on January 21, 1880, the O&W set a goal of improving the Oswego-New York corridor, as well as the branches to New Berlin, Delhi, and Ellenville, N.Y., it had inherited from the New York & Oswego Midland, which had constructed the lines. The O&W developed a new entrance to Gotham from Middletown, N.Y., that ran to Cornwall on the Hudson River, thence to Weehawken, N.J., by rights on the New York, West Shore & Buffalo Railway (later New York Central).

In 1886, the O&W leased the operation of the Utica, Clinton & Binghamton and the Rome & Clinton railroads from the Delaware & Hudson Canal Co., and built a new line to Sylvan Beach on the eastern shore of Oneida Lake. By acquiring the UC&B and R&C, the O&W extended its operation into new market areas, and the Sylvan Beach Loop (as it became known) became a seasonally important corridor for providing transportation to central New York's recreational mecca. Three years later, the O&W added two new branches: the Wharton Valley Railway from New Berlin to Edmeston, and the Port Jervis, Monticello & Summitville, which connected its three namesake communities.

A more significant addition occurred in 1890 when the O&W orchestrated the building of a 54-mile branch from Cadosia, N.Y., to Scranton, Pa., to tap the rich coal reserves in Pennsylvania's Lackawanna Valley. Revenue from this Scranton Division would produce a robust financial condition that gave O&W the means, and the need, to pursue further line improvements.

Because of the railroad's emergence as a coal-hauler, the Lake Ontario harbor piers at Oswego, N.Y., were improved, and coal delivery trestles at Cornwall and Weehawken were built. A water-borne fleet was also built up to enhance operations in the New York harbor, as well as northeastern sea-

Robert F. Collins, courtesy John Talbi

Maroon-and-gold 1923 Alco 4-8-2 405 leads O&W's *Mountaineer* south at Winterton, N.Y., in '39.

board and Great Lakes destinations.

Further, owing to the onslaught of heavy coal trains on the system, the O&W prosecuted the excavation for its fourth tunnel (under Northfield Mountain) to eliminate a mainline switchback (the other three tunnels were at Cadosia, South Fallsburg, and Bloomingburg). Five years after the tunnel went into service in 1891, the opening of the Pecksport Connecting Railway provided an alternate route for freight trains that previously had to assault the heavy grade at Eaton on the Northern Division.

The heavier trains and locomotives forced the O&W to strengthen all its bridges. It also built several new ones, including the 820-foot long, 165-foot high structure over Lyon Brook to replace a spindly Midland span. Beginning in 1902 (the same year the branch to Ellenville was extended to Kingston), the O&W set about double-tracking its Scranton Division and its Southern Division south of Cadosia.

This project was finished in sections over the next nine years, and upon its completion, the O&W had reached its most modern and efficient form. The only other major route change would occur in 1928 when three miles of new mainline track were laid to eliminate 21 grade crossings in Fulton. O&W's final new depot was built on this new segment, as well.

As it improved its physical characteristics, the O&W also acquired modern motive power to haul its numerous coal, milk, passenger, and general freight trains. Where previously Camelbacks of the American, Mogul, and Consolidation wheel arrangements were as common as the road's wooden coaches and country depots, a corps of end-cab locomotives helped usher in the new era. E-class Ten-Wheelers (1911), W-class Consolidations (1910-11), X-class "Bull Mooses" (2-10-2's, in 1915), and Y-class Mountains (1922 and 1929) provided the power for passenger trains to the Catskills, milk trains to Gotham, and coal trains to Oswego, Cornwall, and Weehawken. Still, many Camelbacks remained in use into the mid-1940's.

The first two decades of the 20th century were O&W's glory years. Business was good, the road was in fine shape, and nothing but black ink was in the ledger books. The chief contributors were coal and milk, and on both, the road had itself to thank. After all, it built the Scranton Division, and although the O&W never handled more than 6 percent of the anthracite hauled out of the Lackawanna Valley, coal revenue fueled the O&W's modernization.

Likewise with the milk trade. O&W had initiated a systematic building of milk stations, creameries, and ice houses, and those gathering points—as well as those of independent companies—were located all along the line to Oswego. The 40-quart milk cans, and later bulk tank cars, moving from upstate New York sites, propelled the O&W into becoming one of the largest suppliers of milk to New York's metropolis. In 1902-03, the O&W led all other railroads in supplying the creamy fluid to Gotham.

As the O&W rolled through the 1920's, its good years were back in the caboose while the locomotive was heading straight into the Great Depression. Besides its saw-tooth profile that did not lend itself to operating economy, the O&W suffered from competition at all its important terminals. Its main competitor was the New York Central, so O&W felt relieved when the New Haven Railroad gained a controlling interest, rather than its arch competitor.

The Depression exacerbated the O&W's operating difficulties. Laced with six mainline bi-directional pusher districts, plus one on the Scranton Division, single-track tunnels in otherwise double-track territory, and declining revenues from coal, milk, and passengers, the O&W was ill-prepared for the worst economic upheaval in America's history.

These traditional revenue sources collapsed during the 1930's, forcing the O&W to close depots and signal towers, reduce its workforce, and single-track its previously needed double track. Short sections of the Southern Division had CTC signaling installed. Bridge traffic was developed to link the Lehigh Valley and Lackawanna railroads at Scranton with the New Haven at Maybrook, N.Y. Northern Division passenger trains had been dropped in 1929.

Despite all this, NYO&W still had to petition for bankruptcy protection, entering receivership in 1937. O&W's trustee, Frederick E. Lyford, pared the physical plant and operations to the bone. Property was sold, wage concessions were requested and received from the unions, and the Midland-built brick stations at Norwich, Oneida, and Oswego were sold (in 1939). The following

CLASSIC TRAINS Collection

This familiar, widely circulated O&W map was created by cartographer Crawford C. Anderson.

Walter Kierzkowski collection; three photos this page courtesy John Talbl

Anthracite was king on O&W from 1890 until 1937; this is Wadell Breaker in Pennsylvania.

Above, William Barton; below, Robert F. Collins

Ancient 1904 Cooke 2-6-0 No. 33 leaves Rome, N.Y., in 1936 under a canopy of steam.

Camelbacks and country depots, key ingredients to the railroad's charm, went hand-in-hand on the "Old Woman," witness 1904 Alco (Cooke) 2-6-0 244 at Hartwood, N.Y.

year, the New Berlin branch was sold to the Unadilla Valley Railway.

Dieselization was hoped to be a savior, and under Lyford's direction a handful of GE 44-ton switchers was bought in 1941. A fleet of nine two-unit EMD FT's was acquired in 1945 and put into fast merchandise service between Scranton and Maybrook, and Scranton and Norwich. Lyford's successors in 1948 acquired additional F3 and NW2 diesels, enough to banish steam locomotives from service by that summer.

By that time, though, O&W's accumulated losses amounted to $38 million. It was beyond the ability of trustees, the reorganization court, and diesel locomotives to extricate the carrier from financial ruin. Nevertheless, passenger trains from Weehawken to Walton (then only to Roscoe) kept running until mail contracts gave out in 1950; the service was suspended in September 1953. Although milk and coal trains were a memory, gray-yellow-and-orange internal-combustion road and switching locomotives soldiered on, leading a dwindling number of ever-shorter freight trains.

By the mid-1950's, the reorganization court—which had been searching for a buyer for the road now truly earning another of its nicknames, the "Old & Weary"—was advocating total abandonment. Additionally, the U.S. government was suing for taxes and retirement payments that were in arrears, and New York state began planning on how best to use the O&W right of way for highway improvements.

On March 29, 1957, the O&W finally reached the end of the line. A final telegraphic train order was sent out to Norwich allowing Extra 805 South to run to Middletown, the railroad's operating headquarters, on that date. When it arrived, the sounds of O&W railroading ceased.

The O&W did not live to see another day. It was scrapped out the following year, and its surviving buildings and property sold to satisfy liens, mortgages, and stockholders. Portions of the

line were acquired by the NYC (Fulton-Oswego), Lackawanna (Utica-New Hartford and Norwich), and Erie (Middletown). Surprisingly, these sections still see sporadic service today, though under more modern banners. Many O&W depots survive, including the 1881-built structure at Munnsville, N.Y., in which this author makes his home.

The success of the New York, Ontario & Western was that it made accessible the interior regions of New York state to habitation, industry, and recreation. Toward that end, the O&W admirably served the villages, townships, and cities along the route that had been served first by the Midland. The O&W's legacy is that it is still fondly remembered by those fortunate enough to have witnessed its vibrant life, and by their sons and daughters, who perpetuate the memory of the railroad their parents thought of as their own. I once asked a gentleman why he rode the O&W to go to New York City when the New York Central could have gotten him there faster. His response: "The O&W was our railroad!"

Mother Hubbards, rural stations, friendly service, and dedicated employees were all part of the NYO&W's quintessential charm. As it turns out, they were more than that. They were the endearments that have kept the road alive in memory for 50 years after abandonment.

NYO&W FACT FILE

(comparative figures are for 1930 and 1956)
Route-miles: 569; 541
Locomotives: 177; 46
Passenger cars: 401; 12
Freight Cars: 5,077; 152
Headquarters city: New York, N.Y.
Special interest group: Ontario & Western Railway Historical Society, P.O. Box 713, Middletown, NY 10940; www.nyow.org
Recommended reading: *O&W*, by William F. Helmer (Howell-North Books, 1959); *Milk Cans, Mixed Trains, and Motor Cars*, by Robert E. Mohowski (Garrigues House, 1995); *Remembering the NY&OW Ry., Oswego to Sidney and Branches*, by John Taibi (Purple Mountain Press, 2006)
Source: *Historical Guide to North American Railroads* (Kalmbach, 1999)

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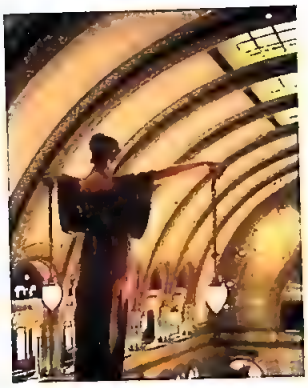

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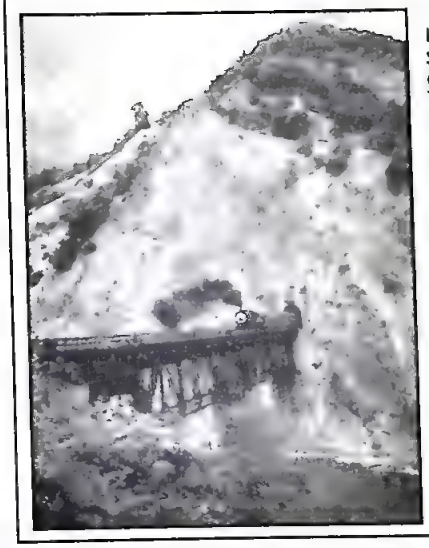

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Fast Mail

At Chicago Union Station, E units are poised for the 9 p.m. departure of Burlington No. 29, the *Fast Mail*.

Wallace W. Abbey

MAIL BY Rail

Tradition, pride, dedication, urgency—they all come together on a 1959 ride aboard Burlington Route train 29, the *Fast Mail*

By David P. Morgan

This article was first publsihed in 1959 as *Fast Mail: The First 75 Years*, a 38-page book commissioned by the Burlington Route and authored by David P. Morgan, editor of TRAINS magazine at the time. Morgan and photographer Wallace W. Abbey rode No. 29 one night.

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Every evening at 9 o'clock an ancient, honorable, unsung ritual takes place a few hundred feet beyond the concourse and gates of Chicago Union Station, along a track that passengers never ride, in the basement of the largest building of its kind in the world. The ritual involves two organizations, one public and the other private. The party of the first part is the United States Post Office Department; the party of the second part is the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company. These two institutions forgather under the lights of track 30, on a concrete loading dock stacked with locked canvas bags and alert to the activity of men in khaki work clothes with little silver badges. And there each night at 9, the P.O. and the CB&Q renew an historic agreement.

The government entrusts the railroad with a solid train of mail, and the railroad undertakes to move it west to the Missouri River—dependably, rapidly, on time. For all its want of ceremony, this ritual is now in its third generation. It has survived three international wars, outlived the station in which it was born and the steam locomotion that made it possible, matched the sternest competition, and accommodated immense increases in loadings.

This is train No. 29, the train that doesn't appear in the familiar red Burlington timetable, the train of somber, businesslike cars that seems at home in the shadows, the train nevertheless with a name: *Fast Mail.* It is just that. Its doors are open to anything that bears postage, from a postcard to a package—that and that alone. All the personnel aboard are there to work. This includes seven or more Postal Transportation Service clerks for the P.O., and the engine crew and three trainmen for the railroad. No. 29 is important but unadorned, without a trace of the glamour of Vista-Domes and stainless steel, pretty dresses, silverware, and window drapes of the *Kansas City Zephyr* arriving across the way in Union Station. The men who sponsor and operate train 29 don't give a fig for frills, only performance.

The performance begins early in the evening when a yard engine spots the storage mail cars and Railway Post Office car on track 30 and the loading begins for the West—for Burlington and Ottumwa and Creston, Council Bluffs and Omaha, Denver and San Francisco and ports across the Pacific. The pace picks up when another yard diesel noses in with the through cars from the East. Twenty minutes or so before the hour, the road diesels idle back through the crossovers and dwarf signals to track 30 and lock couplers with the lead mail car. Carmen mate air-brake hoses and steam lines. No. 29 is being born. A few hours ago it was just a string of empty cars; now there is mail aboard and power ahead.

The expressionless, inexorable clocks along the track 30 platform tick toward 9 o'clock, and discipline tightens. Doors slam shut on the storage cars as the foreman of the loading dock surveys his creation. At 8:56 four bags are flung into the RPO car, at 8:58½ one more bag appears. Then the seconds drain away, the foreman lifts his arm, and the Burlington, the party of the second part, is ready to roll. Up front, diesel engines pick up on the rpm's, the generators convert their torque into direct current, which flows silently to the axle-mounted, truck-suspended traction motors. The long silvery locomotives move . . . and with them move 15 cars of mail.

The *Fast Mail* is under way; a ritual has been observed. And a proud 75-year-old tradition is intact and perpetuated.

We moderns take this swift, volume movement of mail for granted. But in the early 1880's, when there were only 50 million Americans instead of 175 million and when "war" still referred to civil strife, the concept of a solid mail train was nothing less than

John Gruber

Mail is loaded aboard train 29's cars at Chicago Union Station in early 1964. Closest to the camera is a class MA-11 RPO, from a batch of 22 60-footers built by Standard Steel Car Co. for the Burlington in 1922.

radical. Tough, proud Chicago had crawled out of its horrific fire of 1871 more intent than ever upon being the marketplace of the Middle West. Yet Chicago's population was barely over 500,000 in 1880 . . . and population is the barometer of mail volume. Even New York, with almost 2 million souls, didn't generate enough mail to ensure the profitable operation of a solid mail express. An Eastern road had attempted such a train in 1875 and had run it just 10 months before discontinuing the experiment on grounds that the mail pay didn't begin to compensate for the high costs of high speed.

Mail is precious lading, however, and its custodians have never been ready to settle for the status quo. Not in the beginning . . . not in 1831 when letters were first carried on an American train . . . not in 1884 . . . not even today, for that matter. It is simply not in the nature of Post Office Department personnel. Thus it was in 1884 that Postmaster General Walter Q. Gresham; his assistant, Frank Hatton; and Capt. James E. White, Superintendent of the Railway Mail Service, were out knocking on doors. They had arranged an expedited, solid mail train service between New York and Chicago; now they were bargaining for another *Fast Mail*—a train to hurry the mail beyond to the Missouri River, to Council Bluffs and Omaha, to a connection with the Union Pacific for California.

The gentlemen from the Post Office came bearing more prestige than profit. They could and did offer this: an exclusive contract for the movement of all the mails between Chicago and the Missouri River. But as a railroad executive remarked, "The mails can be massed east of Chicago, but they cannot be west. At Chicago they scatter out like the fingers on the hand." Still, Postmaster General Gresham and his lieutenants were not turned back. The mails

from the East arrived in Chicago at 12:35 a.m. Could any railroad forward them to Council Bluffs to make a connection departing there at 7:59 p.m. the same day?

One railroad wouldn't even discuss the matter. Another said yes—for $1,500 per day in addition to the mail pay and a premium of $75,000 a year.

What about Chicago, Burlington & Quincy? "The Department employed all the influence at its command," said a postal executive, but at first CB&Q Vice-President Tom Potter was unmoved.

Another meeting was arranged, this one at the Grand Pacific Hotel in Chicago. The date was March 10, 1884. For both the Post Office and the Burlington it was going to be a date to remember. The government men stated their case once again. In return for an exclusive mail contract—without any premium payment, though—Burlington must operate a solid mail train from Chicago to Council Bluffs, 499 miles, in 15 hours 50 minutes, or at an average speed of 31½ mph. Six days a week, too. Today that would be fair driving time, and it compares favorably with certain bus schedules. Seventy-five years ago it was going like the wind. Why, Burlington No. 1, the *Denver and Pacific Express*, required 20½ hours to cover these 499 miles.

Vice-President Potter knew his men and his road. He finally consented, and an agreement was quickly drawn up. As Postmaster General Gresham turned to sign it he asked Tom Potter when the train would be ready.

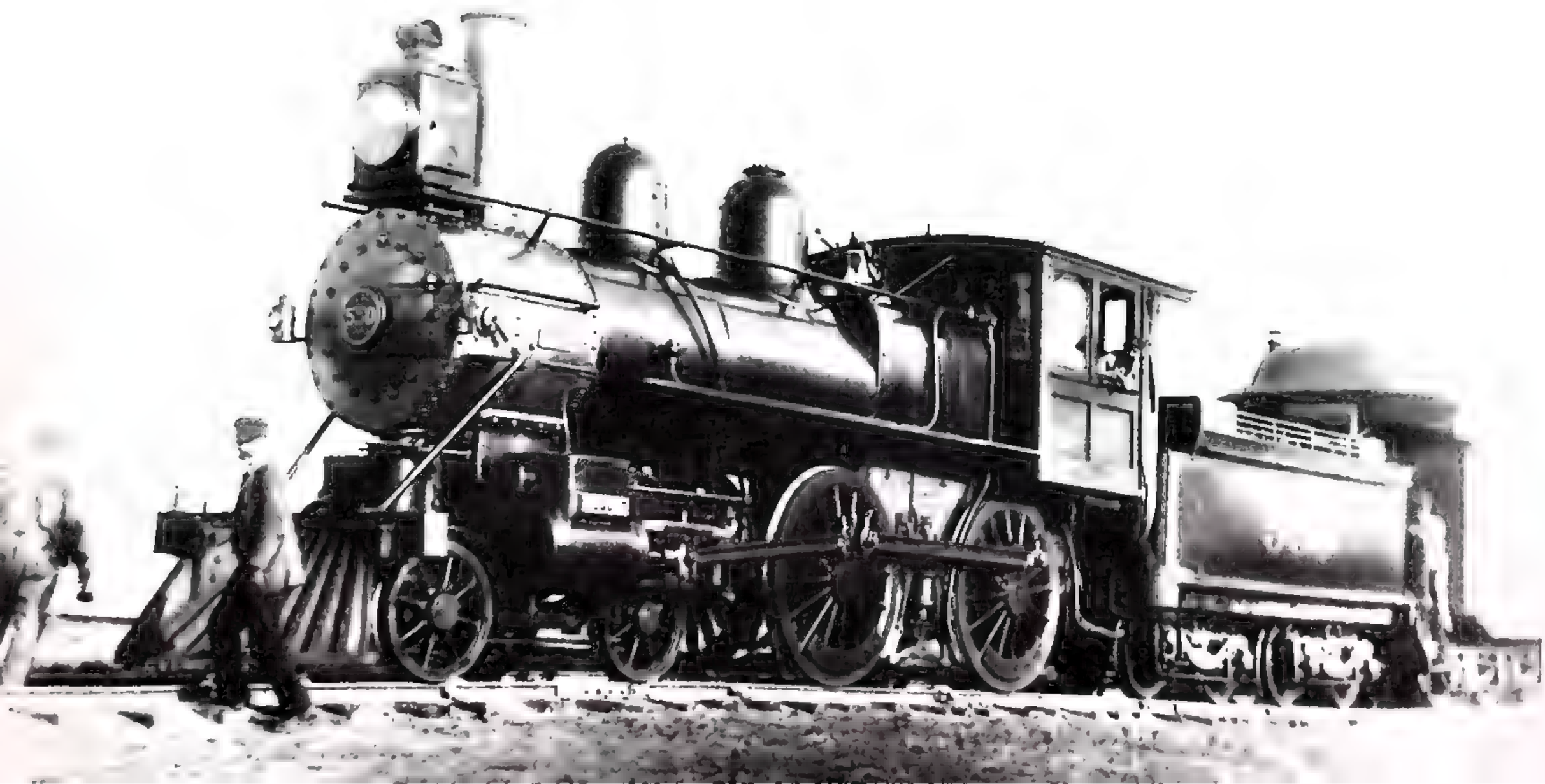
"Tomorrow morning, General."

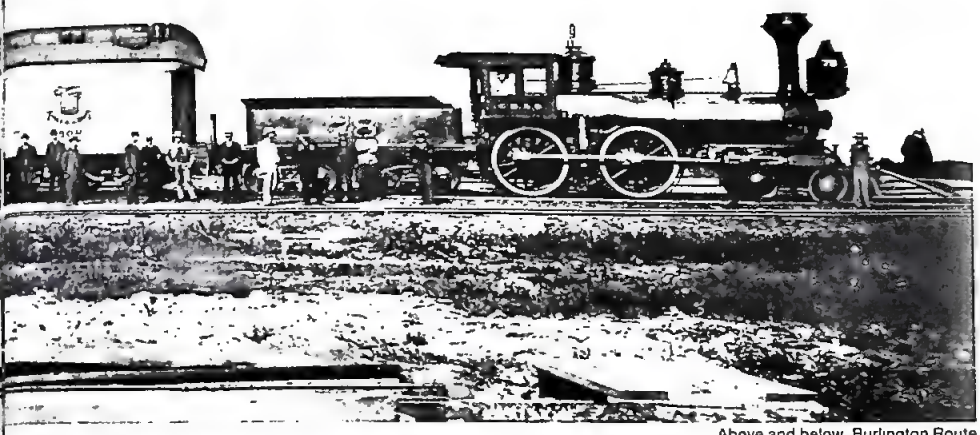
As the postal officials were to discover, that was the Burlington way. Deliberation, yes, but once a decision has been reached, action takes place. On time and per agreement.

After all, there was tradition to protect and promote—even then, in 1884. Way, way back, even before Fort Sumter had been fired upon, a railroad that was to become part of the Burlington had been instrumental in speeding the mail. The first pouch of oilskin-wrapped envelopes bearing $5-per-half-ounce postage and destined for the inauguration of the Pony Express on April 3, 1860, was rushed to the banks of the Missouri River by the Hannibal & St. Joseph, now part of the Burlington Route.

"Run wild, Hannibal to St. Joseph, regardless of all trains"—that was the

Rogers-built American type No. 550, part of CB&Q's exhibit at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, was a regular on the *Fast Mail* in the 1890's. She's on that duty here, her crew too busy to stand still for the camera.





Above and below, Burlington Route

Men stand proudly (left) with the *Fast Mail*, made up of 4-4-0 78 and RPO's 908 and 914, in a heavily retouched photo made at Burlington, Iowa, shortly after the train's March 11, 1884, inauguration. About 15 years later (below), *Fast Mail* clerks strike sorting poses aboard a wooden mail car whose basic arrangement would carry through to the end of all RPO operations seven decades later.

Henry J. McCord

At Galesburg, Ill., 162 miles from Chicago Union Station, mailbags and parcel post are passed from depot baggage cart into train 29's RPO car. The *Mail* has averaged more than 70 mph since is last stop, Aurora.

message handed to Engineer Addison Clark as he began the 206-mile run to the river with the wood-burning eight-wheeler engine *Missouri* and a single coach. Run wild, he did. He averaged 50 mph on the crude track of a brand-new railroad. He managed to attain 70 mph, a mark which may well have rendered Engineer Clark and his companions the fastest humans in the world on that day. There were casualties but they concerned neither human life nor the mails. ("It rained hogs all the way," recalled a rider.) Wiry Johnny Frey, the first Pony Express rider, got his pouch of mail on time, in fast time. Not only that, but two years later the Hannibal & St. Joe introduced the first mail car designed for sorting letters en route, the original "post office on wheels."

Now, little more than two decades later, Burlington was once again being put to the test.

"A raw March morning," is what the historians tell us about the weather on March 11, 1884. Chicago was asleep when the first solid mail train west was born between Madison and Adams streets in the shelter of Union Depot, the red-brick predecessor of today's Union Station. There, Burlington's *Fast Mail* stood as the clocks ticked toward 3 a.m. It was a short train: engine and tender, a car of mail from New York that had arrived at midnight, a baggage car filled with Chicago newspapers, and a special coach bearing the Postmaster General and his party and Burlington's Tom Potter.

At 3 o'clock the Fast Mail chuffed off into the blustery, wet night—a small steam engine and three wooden cars on their way to an appointment in Council Bluffs. The man at the throttle for the first lap, a gentleman with the perhaps apropos name of Paradise, was limited only by divine authority. He'd been instructed to "open her up and get to Aurora as fast as God will let you." He did, too, running those 37 miles in 43 minutes.

The *Fast Mail* has been running ever since, though virtually everything about the train, indeed about the Burlington, has changed except the track gauge of 4 feet 8½ inches and the pledge to speed the mail. Suppose we could summon back the *Mail*'s creators—Walter Gresham, Frank Hatton, Cap White; and Tom Potter and Charles Perkins—what would they think of today's train, CB&Q No. 29, as its diesels roar into the night, past the coachyards, around the curve at 16th and Canal, and down the triple-tracked speedway west to Aurora?

You there, Tom Potter—what say you about a diesel-electric locomotive producing 4,250 horsepower, smoothly, effortlessly, tirelessly? And President Perkins—the rails No. 29 is riding weigh 129 pounds to the yard and are spiked to creosoted ties mounted in deep slag rock ballast. Automatic block signals and centralized traffic control protect the *Fast Mail*'s journey west, rendering routine what you thought radical.

Or you, Mr. Postmaster General! Tonight, 75 years later, we've got 15 cars of mail, not just one, and No. 29 sometimes departs Chicago in two sections with as many as 25 cars.

Say there, Hatton and White—come along to the Railway Post Office car as today's *Fast Mail* gathers speed, and see what your successors in the Post Office Department have done to expedite the mails. The RPO is officially CB&Q car No. 2332, a 60-foot vehicle custom-constructed to meet rigid P.O. specifications. Inside are pigeonhole cases for sorting letters, pipe racks to hold the open-mouthed canvas sacks and pouches, tables, and storage space. Seven or more men work here . . . standing up. At peak output they could depart Chicago with 150 pouches, each containing up to 3,000 letters; pick up 150 more pouches en route; and process all 300 before No. 29 terminates at 5:45 a.m. in Omaha. All this in a space just 60 by 10 feet. A far cry, indeed, from the tiny wooden car on the Hannibal & St. Joe that inspired it all.

Yes, the men of 1884 would be impressed by No. 29 as its diesels go roaring through the night. Anyone would be, in fact, who was aware of the train and its mission. The essence of mail

handling is twofold, if reduced to its simplest terms. The mail must be transported. The mail must be sorted. Train 29 does both jobs, simultaneously. For as the *Fast Mail* rolls along, the clerks are opening up sacks of mail labeled for areas and states; making separations of that mail by sorting it into the pigeonholes; finally pouching it for stations en route and connecting trains. On this specific Railway Post Office line—which is officially "Chicago & Council Bluffs 29"—the crew is making 72 "mixed" separations for such Western states as Wyoming and Utah; 36 for Missouri; 108 for Nebraska; and 204 for Iowa—not to mention 96 for Omaha itself.

Before dawn the RPO will have pouched mail for a total of 22 connecting trains and Highway Post Offices ("hypos," the clerks call 'em), plus even more mail for Star Route trucks. Example: mail is sorted for such en route Iowa destinations as Burlington, Ottumwa, Albia, Osceola, and Creston, then unloaded at Galesburg, Ill., and held there for train 3, which follows in about two hours and picks up the pouches for fast delivery.

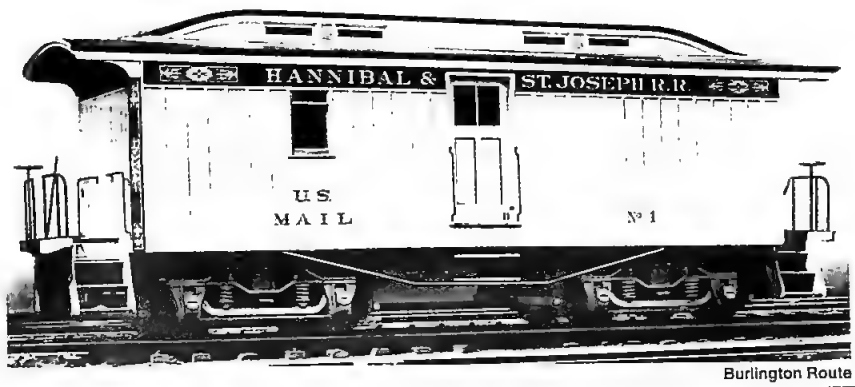
Another example: the clerks of train 29 will sort mail for towns through which the *Fast Mail* hurtles even while the pigeonholes bearing their names are filling up. No worry, though, for these pouches are simply dropped off for pickup by the eastbound *Denver Zephyr*'s Railway Post Office for morning delivery. Yet another example: mail for Omaha "proper"—the city itself—will be sorted so specifically that the letter carriers can pick it up at the station without the need for the pouches to even enter the post office building.

And just as a dining car can turn out a meal a minute from a galley whose size a housewife would complain of, so can a Railway Post Office separate mail in a volume which a sizable brick-and-mortar and immobile Post Office would be hard-pressed to emulate. Foot for foot, man for man, in fact, there exists no equal of an RPO.

The *Fast Mail* doesn't dawdle. It never has. From a standing start in Chicago Union Station the big diesels require just 36 minutes to eat up the 37.7 miles out to suburban Aurora. The next lap to Galesburg, 124½ miles, is taken at an even faster clip, the average speed being 71.8 mph. The air horns blasting for country grade crossings and the *clickety-clack* of wheels on rail joints inject a sense of drama that even a mail clerk of 20 or 30 years' seniority is susceptible to . . . but the sustained speed of the diesels seems automatic by the standards of yesteryear.

First as well as fast

Although mail had been carried, and even sorted, on U.S. trains from the 1830's, what is generally accepted as the first Railway Post Office began July 28, 1862, on the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad, a CB&Q predecessor across Missouri. St. Joseph was a gateway to the West, and east end of the Pony Express route during the 19 months it ran, April 1860-October 1861. The H&StJ RPO began with converted baggage cars, but got purpose-built mail cars after a few weeks. It lasted only until 1863 or '65 (the first RPO considered "regular" and "permanent," Chicago-Clinton, Iowa, on C&NW, began in 1864). In 1933, CB&Q rebuilt a 40-foot ex-H&StJ baggage car into a replica of the 30-foot mail cars of 1862. As H&StJ No. 1, the car was displayed sporadically around the Q system, often with 4-4-0 35. Both are at the Patee House Museum, St. Joseph.



Burlington Route

Burlington has always been a fast runner, but once upon a time speed was a commodity produced more by nerve and brawn than is the case today. From the time the railroad secured the mail contract in 1884 until 1897, for example, the schedule was reduced upon 10 different occasions, even while the load was rising from a couple of cars to six containing 150 tons of mail. Year after year, steam and steel and men were asked to move more and move it faster, and the greater the stress, the stronger grew the pride of the Burlington in its *Fast Mail*.

Rival roads, jealous of the prestige that went with the mail contract and aware that more and more mail was being moved, began to race the Burlington to Council Bluffs by setting up competitive schedules to win the favor of the Post Office Department. And just as often as the attempt was made, Burlington fought back with even faster schedules. Iowa newspapers, attuned to the public excitement attached to the *Fast Mail*, began reporting the train and its exploits in a manner reserved today for moon rockets.

On Christmas Eve 1894, the *Ottumwa Daily Courier* breathlessly reported one speedup in which "when the train reached Chariton it was 19 minutes behind time but began to redeem itself from that point westward. When it reached Creston, quite a crowd had gathered at the depot to witness the movement and see how it came out. The stop there consumed one minute and three seconds, during which time the mail for that place was delivered and engine 550 with Engineer Kelley at the throttle was hitched on. A pusher helped to give the train momentum, and she seemed to be a thing of life as she moved in her onward course. The train scored a minute between Creston and Cromwell making the distance, 6 miles, in as many minutes."

As readers clamored for more, eager to champion their railroad, the press virtually camped on the right of way.

There was scorn for a delay, as when the *Chicago Record* archly noted that "six more minutes were dropped by a bungled job in taking water."

There was sympathy for the victims of speed: "At Biggsville a horse attempted, at the last moment, to cross just ahead of the train. He figured wrongly though, and when last seen he was skimming through space . . . his spirit had flitted to horse heaven."

There was praise and wonderment expressed over the engines: "A large class W never working more smoothly . . . No. 92 is the regular *Fast Mail* engine between Ottumwa and Creston, and it

seemed natural for her to get down to business . . . She is a perfect model of the locomotive builder's art. Of course, the west-enders are doubly proud of her for on her rapidity depends the reputation of the road. She is relied upon to make up any lost time which may be lost on any of the divisions between Chicago and Creston, and she usually does it."

Enthusiasm was rampant in an age when the steam locomotive represented man's crowning technical achievement, and it was richly deserved by the *Fast Mail*—and never more so, before or since, than on the climactic night of February 17, 1899. That night the *Mail* was held in Chicago 1 hour 17 minutes awaiting its connection from New York. Thereupon Burlington managed to cover the 500.2 miles to Council Bluffs in a running time of 524 minutes, excluding stops. [Line changes had altered the distance from the original 499 miles; by 1959 the figure was 493.3 miles.]

Small wonder that in a day when there were sheet-music sales instead of TV programs, Burlington sponsored a popular song entitled "The Fast Mail" and a booklet called, "How the 'Greyhounds' of the Burlington Beat the Rising Moon." Small wonder, too, that the train's engineer was included in a boy's book, *Careers of Danger and Daring*, or that in years to come people in railroad towns were to say almost reverently of a retired engineman, "He ran the Mail."

It took guts, all right, to push an engine like No. 550, the 50-ton American-type which Burlington had so proudly displayed at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, then permanently assigned to the *Fast Mail*. She was the talk of the system, the pride of the Rogers Locomotive Company—the engine the boys depended upon to make up any time lost by others. She was elemental, innocent of the roller bearings and mechanical lubricators and automatic stokers and feedwater heaters that the next generation would take for granted. No. 550 was simply a Belpaire boiler carrying steam at 160 pounds per square inch pressure and slung over an engine truck and two pairs of 69-inch driving wheels.

And yet, night after night, engineer and fireman would swing into the wooden cab of No. 550 and go plunging through the night at 50 and 55 mph. A mile a minute was common enough, and 70 or more could be attained when the train was late and the United States mail was at stake.

The relentless tide of technology reduced No. 550 and her sisters to scrap, of course, as a succession of larger, stronger steam engines were fabricated for the *Fast Mail*. Ten-Wheelers, Pacifics, Mountains, Hudsons, Northerns arrived, one after the other, to haul the all-steel trains of the 20th century . . . and the ride of the big engines was steadied by heavier rail and rock ballast, protected by automatic block signals. What had been a breakneck pace, a raw test of nerve and skill, became orthodox, accepted, normal.

The enormous capacity of the locomotives that carried on the tradition established by No. 550 was displayed years later when, during World War II, Burlington was moving literally mountains of mail for delivery to troops overseas. In a period of less than a month in fall 1944, the railroad hauled more than 1,200 cars of solid mail west from Chicago to Council Bluffs, and on the night of October 17, a huge O-5 4-8-4 left the city on a passenger-train schedule with 82 cars of Christmas gifts!

Pride of the CB&Q

Burlington No. 29's "Fast Mail" moniker was somewhat honorary. Yes, the road referred to the train as such on the occasion of its 75th anniversary in 1959, but never officially so in day-to-day operation. In employee timetables, 29 was simply identified as "Daily Mail." (To further cloud the matter, employee timetables of Chicago Union Station listed 29 as "Mail and Express," but listed locals 7 and 8 as the "Fast Mail," although their schedules were anything but.) Yet veteran operators at Chicago's Union Avenue Tower would later recall that only two trains—No. 1, the railroad's flagship *Denver Zephyr*, and No. 29—would elicit telephone calls from Q headquarters on West Jackson Boulevard, demanding an explanation when delays to either train were reported in departing the Windy City. In truth, these were CB&Q's First Class trains that mattered. It is no wonder. During 1964, the *Denver Zephyrs*, No. 29, and 29's eastbound quasi-counterpart, "Express 14," earned a whopping 44 percent of that year's $6.2 million gross revenue on passenger, mail, and express operations.

Just how fast was the *Fast Mail*? No. 29 averaged (according to April 1964 employee timetables) 62.9 mph Chicago-Aurora; 67.3 Aurora-Galesburg, with one intermediate stop; 63.5 Galesburg-Ottumwa, with one stop; and 57.3 Ottumwa-UP Transfer, with three stops. All of which belied the fact that between long station dwells for which the schedule made no accommodation, Q enginemen and their silver charges scorched the trainsheets. One engineer's trick consisted of applying the 1960's equivalent of a vise-grip to the appropriate pressure-point of the lead E7's speed recorder, thereby immobilizing the needle and permitting free rein beyond the 117 mph governor rating. Witnesses in the cab report passing New London, Iowa, in excess of 125 mph.

Vividly recalled is a September 1965 encounter with 29, witnessed from an open Dutch door on train 12, the eastbound *Nebraska Zephyr*. As 12 slowed for its stop at Aurora, the darkness beyond the vestibule abruptly came ablaze from a sweeping Mars light on the adjacent track—29 was under way. The roar of three E7's digging in flooded the vestibule, followed by the increasingly rapid gait of the accelerating train—Flexivans and Armour yellow and SP gray and Pullman green. That night, the man with his hand on the throttle of 29's lead motor was the embodiment of the term "sense of urgency."

No. 29 soldiered on into the mid-'60's, frequently running at the Q's maximum limit of four motors and 22 cars, and celebrating its 83rd anniversary on March 10, 1967. But the train would not see its 84th, falling victim to the Post Office's 1967 decision to pursue the wholesale elimination of RPO's (as well as transportation of storage mail on First Class schedules).

First to go was No. 7, discontinued between Chicago and Omaha July 1, 1967, following the loss of its RPO and the majority of its storage mail (the latter shifted to expedited freight trains) and eastbound train No. 14.

The exodus of storage mail (and, simultaneously, much of the lower-rated express) to freight trains took with it the economic justification for a stand-alone Chicago-Council Bluffs-Omaha mail train, by then little more than the RPO and a rider car. No. 29 was unceremoniously discontinued October 1, 1967 (and No. 8 was consolidated with No. 30 east of Omaha). Thereafter, the remains of 29—the RPO and the few crumbs of mail and express that remained, were added to No. 3, the *Ak-Sar-Ben Zephyr*, until June 27, 1969, when the Chicago & Omaha RPO made its final overnight run.—*J. W. Schultz*

Wallace W. Abbey

Marker lights glow on the storage mail/crew rider car on 29's rear end as the RPO ahead of it is unloaded at Council Bluffs Transfer, near the end of Morgan and Abbey's ride.

So it is an honorable history that today's *Fast Mail* continues as No. 29 thunders across Illinois and Iowa toward the Missouri River. Galesburg, 11:20 p.m. Burlington, 12:07 a.m. Ottumwa, 1:14 a.m. Albia, 1:46 a.m. At each stop a postal transfer clerk or a Burlington employee records the loading and unloading of pouches. And back along the train, railroad employees open the bulk cars of parcel post, loading and unloading the bags of packages.

Precious lading, this, surely more to be valued than anything short of life itself. Think for a moment of what rides No. 29, of the secrets and joys and heartaches penciled and penned and typed and printed:

Enclosed please find our check in the amount of . . . Greetings. Having submitted yourself to a board composed of your friends and neighbors . . . To the Editor: The election proved conclusively in my opinion that . . .

Father's health is failing and we think you should be here . . . Happy Birthday! . . . I love you deeply, Margie, and I know that we . . . Unless payment is forthcoming we will be obliged to . . .

This is not mere freight but rather human expression and deed which the clerks in the Railway Post Office sort into pigeonholes labeled Pawnee City, Wahoo, Grand Island, Lincoln, also (in the instance of Omaha "proper") Grain Exchange Building, University of Omaha, UP, Offutt Field, Federal Reserve. The pouches are opened, the mail separated, the pouches locked, the mail loaded and unloaded as train 29 races the dawn into Council Bluffs.

A few minutes past 2 o'clock one of the clerks in the RPO slides back the door, and watches for a familiar landmark in Chariton, where he puts off a couple of sacks. No. 29 rolls on. Osceola, 2:44 a.m. Creston, 3:16 a.m.

No. 29 is the flagship of an impressively large Burlington mail-carrying fleet which provides the Post Office Department daily service on 17 different lines covering 5,008 route-miles of railroad in 10 states. A roster of 231 cars is allocated to this service, of which 63 are Railway Post Offices. In addition, the railroad provides mail storage and handling facilities at 521 on-line communities and cities.

The Post Office Department makes payments to the railroad in three ways: a basic payment per mile for an RPO car, regardless of load; a payment per linear foot of space occupied in a storage mail car; and a payment per bag handled on loading docks and platforms by railroad employees. The P.O. is vested with authority to place mail

Wallace W. Abbey

No. 29's E-unit "motors" back onto the train after switching out cars at Council Bluffs. Ahead: a short run across the river to Omaha, end of the line for Burlington's *Fast Mail*.

upon any passenger train Burlington operates, from an Iowa local to No. 1, the gleaming Vista-Dome *Denver Zephyr*; to fine the railroad for tardy or otherwise inadequate service; and to establish the specifications for mail-carrying equipment. The Post Office Department places the mail on the basis of cost, time, and service. P.O. men are notoriously impartial about their business. The carrier that performs carries the mail—it's that simple.

All of which helps to explain why Burlington men are quietly proud of their *Fast Mail*. Since that epic night in March 1884, one generation after another of engineers and firemen, conductors and trainmen, dispatchers and trainmasters, section foremen and presidents has jealously preserved the train's reputation for delivering the mail—on time. The task has not been routine.

No mass transportation job ever is. A draft board can thin the ranks of skilled employees in time of war. A thunderstorm over Iowa can swell a river, push a thousand streams over their banks. Christmas mails can stack the sacks 8 feet high in every last car the railroad can beg or borrow. But the mail moves regardless.

No man on today's Burlington knows that better than Harry C. Murphy, current occupant of the president's chair in the Burlington Building near Union Station, Chicago. As a young man he was wont to hang over the railing of the old Spring Street overpass in Aurora when the high-wheeler hauling the *Fast Mail* came blasting through town on her way west. As a man in the ranks, he acquired a wholesome admiration for locomotive engineers who had run the *Mail*. As a district maintenance engineer and later division superintendent at Creston, he programmed the work of the section gangs whose mauls and strong backs surfaced and aligned the track over which the *Fast Mail* raced. As president, he makes it the first business of the day to examine the road's morning report, the sheet of terse figures that spell out how the trains are operating on 11,000 miles of high iron in 14 states. On the sheet is No. 29. It had best be labeled "on time." It almost invariably is—as it was at that Spring Street overpass.

And as it is today when the diesels of the *Fast Mail* roll into Council Bluffs at 4:59 a.m. Here at the vast, mechanized mail handling center, jointly sponsored by Burlington and Union Pacific, 29 all but dissolves. During the night, one car of storage mail was cut off at Burlington, one at Ottumwa, another at Creston. Several cars are destined for Council Bluffs itself; others will be switched into the UP Transfer so that their con-

All roads (nearly) led to the Transfer

Union Pacific Museum

William W. Kratville

Busy times at the UP Transfer: In December 1951 (above left), workers load westbound mail into refrigerator cars, pressed into mail service for the Christmas rush. A westward view (upper right) shows CB&Q and Chicago Great Western trains in September 1965.

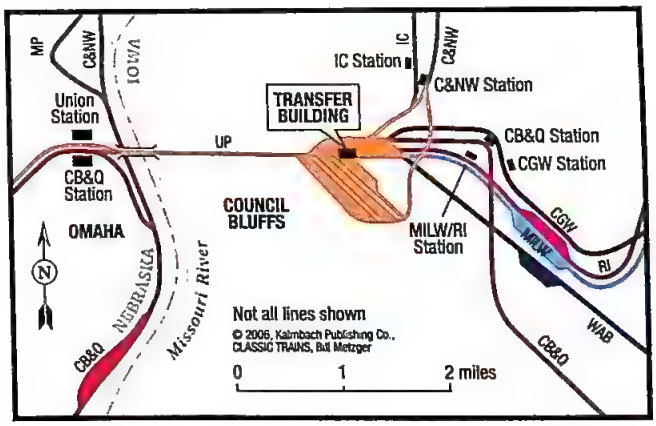
During the era of railway mail, one of the busiest mail facilities in the nation was in Council Bluffs, Iowa: the Union Pacific (or Council Bluffs) Transfer. The Transfer started as a combined depot and hotel in 1877, five years after the UP (having been established in Omaha in 1865) opened its bridge across the Missouri River. Shortly thereafter, a mail facility was established in a UP building adjacent to the hotel. These facilities served to funnel the passnger and mail traffic from the trains of the growing number of railroads being built from the east to trains of the UP for forwarding west. The increased use of sleeping and dining cars, as well as the operation of through cars over more than one railroad, resulted in the closure of the hotel in 1927, but the volume of mail to be transferred kept increasing.

In the 1920's-1960's era, the roads using the Transfer were: UP (its owner), Burlington Route, Chicago & North Western, Milwaukee Road, Rock Island, Wabash, and Chicago Great Western. (Illinois Central, a minor player in mail traffic, had its own Missouri River bridge three miles north of UP's, and did not use the Transfer.) If UP had reached Chicago in those days, there would have been no need for a major mail transfer facility at Council Bluffs.

Because most trains from the east continued on into Omaha, the Transfer meant delays in varying lengths of time as cars were cut in and out and mail was transferred from one train to another. The Transfer operated round the clock, but mornings and evenings were busiest. The Christmas rush was the most hectic time of year, with extra cars, trains, and employees needed to handle the mail.

In 1937, UP razed most of the old hotel building to make way for a modern concrete and steel structure, which it leased to the Post Office. An elaborate conveyor system measuring nearly a quarter of a mile in length was installed in 1951.

The decline in railway mail caused the Transfer to close in 1966. Today, the site is occupied by a contract freight-car repair company, but one wing of the original 1877 complex survives, perhaps the oldest railroad building in Iowa.—*William W. Kratville*



tents can be unloaded and distributed onto other trains; and certain loads are destined for the mail train for California. Which leaves the *Fast Mail* reduced to just its diesels, its Railway Post Office, and storage mail cars for Omaha.

Switching completed, No. 29 eases off into the faint, breaking daylight, trundles across the bridge spanning the wide, muddy Missouri, and rolls into Burlington's Omaha station. The diesels are cut off . . . the flagman takes down the marker lamps from the rear car . . . the RPO clerks pick up their grips and climb down from their car.

Let's see now, what was it a Burlington advertisement of 1899 said in regard to the *Fast Mail*? "The fastest time can be made only by a railroad equipped with the best roadbed, rolling stock, motive power, and above all a force of men constructively disciplined and all pulling the same way."

So it has been from the beginning, from that cold March night in 1884 right on through the exploits of engine 550 and her dauntless crew to that historic eve in World War II when Burlington rolled an 82-car mail train and to this date, this a.m., this moment. The railroad has observed its nightly ritual with the United States Post Office Department, moved all the mail it was offered, rolled it to the Missouri River on time. Burlington's men have, as always, been "pulling the same way." ■

K.C. CALBUR.
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Photo by Roy Inman

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The Railway Mail Service had an *esprit de corps* reminiscent of the Marines

By Peter A. Hansen

Seven Railway Mail Service retirees gather in 2004 with restored Kansas City Southern RPO car 30 at the Midland Railway tourist line in Baldwin City, Kans. From left are John Pirog, George Corben, Lester Brown, Dick Wiese, Marvin Treadway, Charles Stephens, and Herb Crawford. KCS 30 is owned by Allen Maty and Charles Pitcher.

J. David Ingles

"Food" for head-end cars is everywhere at Kansas City Union Station about 10 p.m. on March 26, 1967. Visible are a Rock Island E8 on No. 3, the *Golden State*; CB&Q GP7 215, likely on No. 23 for Omaha; and Santa Fe PA 56 on No. 1, the mail-heavy *San Francisco Chief*.

"You're not a minute too early." Ray Eble is one of those guys with a gift for deadpan humor—sometimes you can't tell whether he's serious or not. In this case, he's both joking and sincere. He is a former railway mail clerk, a once-numerous breed for whom the years are beginning to take a toll. Even though railway mail was largely discontinued in the late 1960's, Eble and his former colleagues in the Kansas City area still get together regularly for lunch, and I asked to sit in and get some of their stories. I've joined in on a couple of lunches like this, and I've also met with some of the same men, one-on-one, for their "true tales of the rails."

What I have found is a group of lifelong friends who combine an easy manner with a sense of mission, who know they spent their careers doing something worthwhile, and who still regard their lives on the rails as the best jobs they ever had. In every sense but the most official, they were railroaders, but their stories have remained mostly untold.

Romantic schemes

It's not hard to see where that sense of mission came from. No less than the railroads on which they ran, the Railway Post Offices kept American commerce flowing. A half-century ago, they handled 24 billion pieces of mail every year—business and personal letters, invoices and remittances, newspapers and parcel post. Imagine our present economy without the U.S. Postal Service and e-mail, and you'll have an idea how much was riding on the performance of the Railway Mail Service.

At the same time, there was a certain romance about the handling of mail that simply doesn't exist today. For one thing, it *was* handled—personally sorted, every piece of it. As the Railway Post Office clerk threw the mail into pigeonholes, he might have a good idea what kind of correspondence it was. Love letters or dunning notices, it gave him a personal connection—for that half-second or so it took to scan and throw the envelope—with the sender and the recipient. Repeat that process a hundred times a minute for a 12- or 14-hour run (RPO clerks generally had much longer runs than railroad operating crews), and something like a microcosm of America inevitably began to take shape in one's head.

At the very least, it was a microcosm of the state or region where the RPO clerk served. The men I interviewed worked on several routes out of Kansas City, the third-largest railway mail terminal in the country, behind New York and Chicago. "We had to know every town in three to five states," depending on the route, said Orville Zimmerman, who worked the Kansas City & Pueblo (Colo.) RPO on the Missouri Pacific.

They learned every town in these states, not just those served by their own

Peter A. Hansen

Ray Eble worked the KC & Tucumcari RPO route on the Rock Island, and he still has to defend that "mighty fine line" against his buddies who worked Santa Fe RPO routes.

trains. To sort a piece of mail, a clerk had to know how it was to be routed to its destination post office, even after it left his train. A letter from Kansas City to Burlington, Colo., for example, might ride the Kansas City & Denver RPO,

Earl Cochran

Donald Sims

At Limon, Colo., on September 14, 1952 (above), the AB6/E7A duo on the Colorado Springs section of Rock Island's *Rocky Mountain Rocket* moves east with the train's RPO. The E8 on the Denver section, visible in the distance, will cut off, and the trains join to proceed to Chicago. Limon was a mail transfer point with Union Pacific, whose train 38, the *Pony Express*, left Denver for K.C. Alco PA's in July 1952 (above).

part of Union Pacific train 9, the *City of St. Louis*, to Limon, Colo., and there be transferred to a truck (in earlier years, to a Rock Island train) for the last leg, back eastward, to Burlington. RPO clerks had to sort every piece before it reached its destination or transfer point.

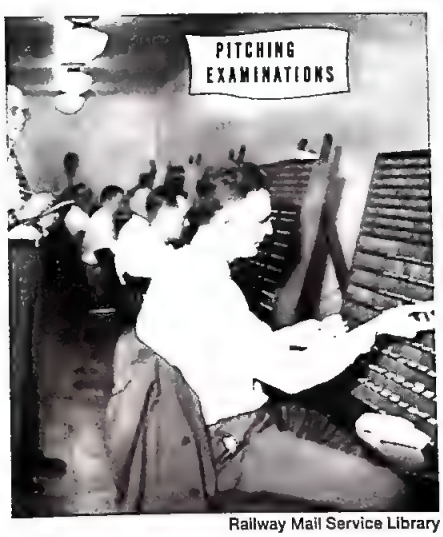
These routings were called "schemes," and RPO clerks knew hundreds of them. The state of Kansas alone had more than 900 post offices, and clerks were constantly tested on their knowledge—not only when first hiring out, but every three months throughout their careers. For the test, a clerk would be seated at a miniature letter case and would be expected to throw hundreds of business-card-sized pieces of simulated mail with 95 percent accuracy. Like some of their stationary-post office counterparts, many RPO clerks had practice cards and cases at home to help them bone up.

Working the RPO's was one of the more difficult jobs in the Post Office Department, a fact that was officially recognized in the pay that clerks received. Not only were they one grade higher than clerks in a brick-and-mortar post office, they also received an hour's pay for 48 minutes of work. Lester Brown, a former supervisor on the Kansas City & Memphis RPO (Frisco trains 105 and 106), explained that, "Theoretically, for every 48 minutes you worked on the road, you were spending 12 minutes on your own time, memorizing schemes and schedules to keep up with your examinations." A wiry 90-year-old who never misses a chance to trumpet the work of the Railway Mail Service, Brown still exhibits the same feistiness he had as a supervisor.

Beyond that elite status and a personal connection to the mail, however, it was working on the rails that gave this job its aura of romance. Life on the road is a life in motion, and motion imparts a heightened sense of purpose. But the Railway Mail Service was also about the fleeting connections with small towns, a sixth sense of exactly where you were in the prairie darkness, and the rural postmaster you'd known for years—but only by a wave at 60 mph. Factor in the shriek of a steam locomotive's whistle or the throbbing of multiple 567 diesel engines on the other side of the RPO car's door, and it's not hard to see why RPO clerks felt a rare sense of calling.

De facto railroaders

These men didn't just live like railroaders—they talked like them too. To be sure, they had an encyclopedic knowledge of schedules and referred to trains by numbers instead of names, but they also had great pride in the railroads that handled their RPO routes.



Railway Mail Service Library

Using miniature cards and racks, RMS clerks undergo a quarterly "pitching exam" for sorting accuracy. They were also tested on "schemes" (routes) and post office locations.

Ray Eble worked the Kansas City & Tucumcari (N.Mex.) RPO on the Rock Island, and in one of the groups I interviewed, he was badly outnumbered by veterans of the Kansas City & Albuquerque Eastern Division RPO, who worked between Kansas City and La Junta, Colo. The "Alb," as it was known, ran on the Santa Fe—or "the mighty Santa Fe," as Eble put it with good-natured derision.

Anything can set off this kind of razzing. In response to an innocent question about the difficulty of throwing mail into the right pigeonholes on a moving train, Herb Crawford of the Alb, a youthful-looking man with a ready smile, said, "Well, the Santa Fe had a very good roadbed, not like the Rock Island." Crawford winked, and Eble rolled his eyes.

For the record, it should be noted that Eble worked the Rock Island when times were good, the ballast was deep, and the trains ran 90 per. The carrier may have struggled for much of its history, but in the 1950's, its *Golden State* was a credible contender to Union Pacific's *City of Los Angeles* and Santa Fe's *Super Chief* for the Chicago-Los Angeles trade. Eble has reason to be proud.

For his part, Eble asserted that the "KC & Tucum" was the longest RPO route in the country, at 613 miles. Crawford retorted that the Alb's Eastern Division was longer when it went by way of Topeka and Great Bend, Kans. . . . which isn't true, but it kept the heat on Eble. (Orville Zimmerman, the KC & Pueblo man, must not have heard this battle of the bragging rights going on at the other end of the table—his route was 620 miles on the Missouri Pacific.)

There is one point on which Crawford and Eble agree, however: they both

Santa Fe Railway

John S. Ingles

Herb Crawford has fond memories of Santa Fe's big 4-8-4's, two of which met with the *Chiefs* east of Las Vegas, N.Mex. (top), in the 1940's. Orville Zimmerman worked the KC & Pueblo on the Missouri Pacific, so likely he spent time on car 810, pictured in August 1960 on the *Colorado Eagle* at Colorado Springs, one station short of where it will become an active Railway Post Office.

loved working behind steam. Eble recalled Rock Island's big fleet of 4-8-4's with pride. Crawford chimed in with his memories of Santa Fe's 2900-series 4-8-4's. Referring to Santa Fe's mail train, he said, "I remember out there at La Junta, waiting to get out on Number 8. The brakeman was bragging on the 2900, and I asked him just how fast that engine would go."

"'As fast as you have the guts to run it!' he said. 'And let me tell you, he wasn't kidding.'"

Another thing the RPO clerks had in common with railroaders was a unique lexicon of slang, decades in the making. Whether they "robbed a box" or dragged "shin peelers" when they "dressed and pulled racks"—or if heaven forbid, they "went stuck" or "carried by" and got "hickies"—the mail-slingers had a verbal shorthand for everything [see "Glossary" on page 39].

A day at the office

A railway mail clerk's workday often started hours before departure. During this advance time, the contracting railroad would spot the car on its departure track, and its crew would arrive to prepare it for service.

Like a dining-car kitchen, an RPO car was a model of organization and economy of space, and every man had a specific assignment. Unlike a kitchen, however, an RPO's fixtures needed to be customized for every new run, since each route required different quantities of pouches or letter cases. Upon arrival at the car, a crew would deploy the pouch racks from their folded locations along the side walls, secure their stanchions to the floor, hang the canvas pouches (for first-class mail) and sacks (for newspapers and parcel post), and label everything according to destination and routing. "Dressing the racks" was an important first step in preparing the car, since any labeling errors or gaps between pouches might result in misdirected mail.

In a similar fashion, each pigeonhole in the letter cases had to be labeled at the start of a run. Every caseman had his own set of labels, and was free to organize the case as he saw fit. Usually, the biggest "separations"—the destinations with the most mail—were placed close at hand to economize movement.

George Corben, who worked the Alb for several years, explained the other duties on the car. "Each clerk had an assignment, starting with the chief clerk, the foreman. And then there'd be a second clerk, who handled the registered [or "Red"] mail, which had high-value contents and had to be signed for by every clerk who handled it. There was also a third clerk, who normally worked the newspapers. Depending on the run, you could have as many as 13 or 14 men in the crew. The others would be the casemen, pouch helpers, and so forth."

At a large postal terminal like Kansas City, scores of pouches would be brought on board and stored in the end of the car until they were ready to be worked. The crew began sorting before departure, beginning with so-called "No. 1" mail—that is, separations to be exchanged early in the run.

Working the RPO was a contact sport. A fully dressed car made for aisles that were sometimes barely a foot wide, and given a large crew and a rocking train, it's not hard to see why women never made serious inroads into Railway Mail. A few women came on as substitutes in the final few months, and John Pirog, a terminal transfer clerk, recalled one in particular. She wasn't harassed, he said, "but she didn't want to do it again."

Transfer clerks, who worked at larger terminals, were responsible for seeing that the mail made its connections between trains. Gust Anderson served in that capacity in Kansas City for several years, and he told me something I

hadn't known: he had the authority to hold departing trains for up to 30 minutes to ensure connections. It was all part of the Post Office Department's contract with the railroads, he said, and "there were rules governing the circumstances where you could do that. You couldn't do it for one pouch, but if you had 40 or 50 to transfer, you could. An example at Kansas City might be the transfer from the St. Louis, Moberly & KC to the KC & Alb."

"From 9 to 23," chimed in George Corben, referring to the Wabash and Santa Fe train numbers for the *City of St. Louis* and *Grand Canyon*, proving that the schemes and schedules hadn't left his head.

Like the train crews, RPO clerks each carried a grip. A well-stocked kit would include stamps and ink pads, tags for letter cases and pouches, schedules and schemes, pencils, a twine knife, a postal regulations manual, the clerk's badge, a revolver, a change of clothes, and goggles needed when catching the mail from trackside cranes.

Clerks would typically bring a lunch from home on the outward trip, and buy something at their away terminal for the return journey. According to George Corben, typical fare might include "a can of beef stew or chili that we would heat in a steam box," a metal enclosure on the RPO that was fed by the train's steam-heat lines.

"Many crews would pool funds and prepare some rather elaborate meals," he added. "Nothing beats a hamburger wrapped in foil and cooked in the steam box. Corn on the cob, potatoes, roasts, and even steaks were prepared the same way. The steaks would be gray in color, but they were delicious."

Roy Inman

Roy Inman

R. J. Foster

George Corben (top) shows how to tie up a mailbag, whose transfer tag shows it would go from the KC & Alb RPO on the Santa Fe to the RPO on Frisco train 105 for Memphis. Just west of K.C. Union Station about 1940 (above), a Frisco train behind 4-8-2 1520 departs as Santa Fe 4-6-4 3456 waits its turn to back into the station to couple onto train 7, the *Fast Mail*.

Before OSHA

Make no mistake: duty aboard an RPO was hard work, and not performed under the best conditions. Cars weren't air-conditioned, a serious liability in the Southwest, and sometimes they weren't even heated. Working directly behind the locomotive made for a noisy environment, and open windows and doors inevitably brought a lot of road dust swirling into the cars.

"And the sacks!" said Orville Zimmerman. "You should see them when they've been dragged in from the rain. Occasionally, you'd get a clean one, but not very often. And of course, once you get that dirty bag into the train, you dump it upside down on the table to empty it, and all the dust just sticks to your sweaty body."

"Yeah," said Corben, "some of these runs, you'd get off looking like you'd been working in a coal mine. I always carried a change of clothes in my grip for when I was in town in La Junta, but when I got back on the train, I'd put my grubbies back on."

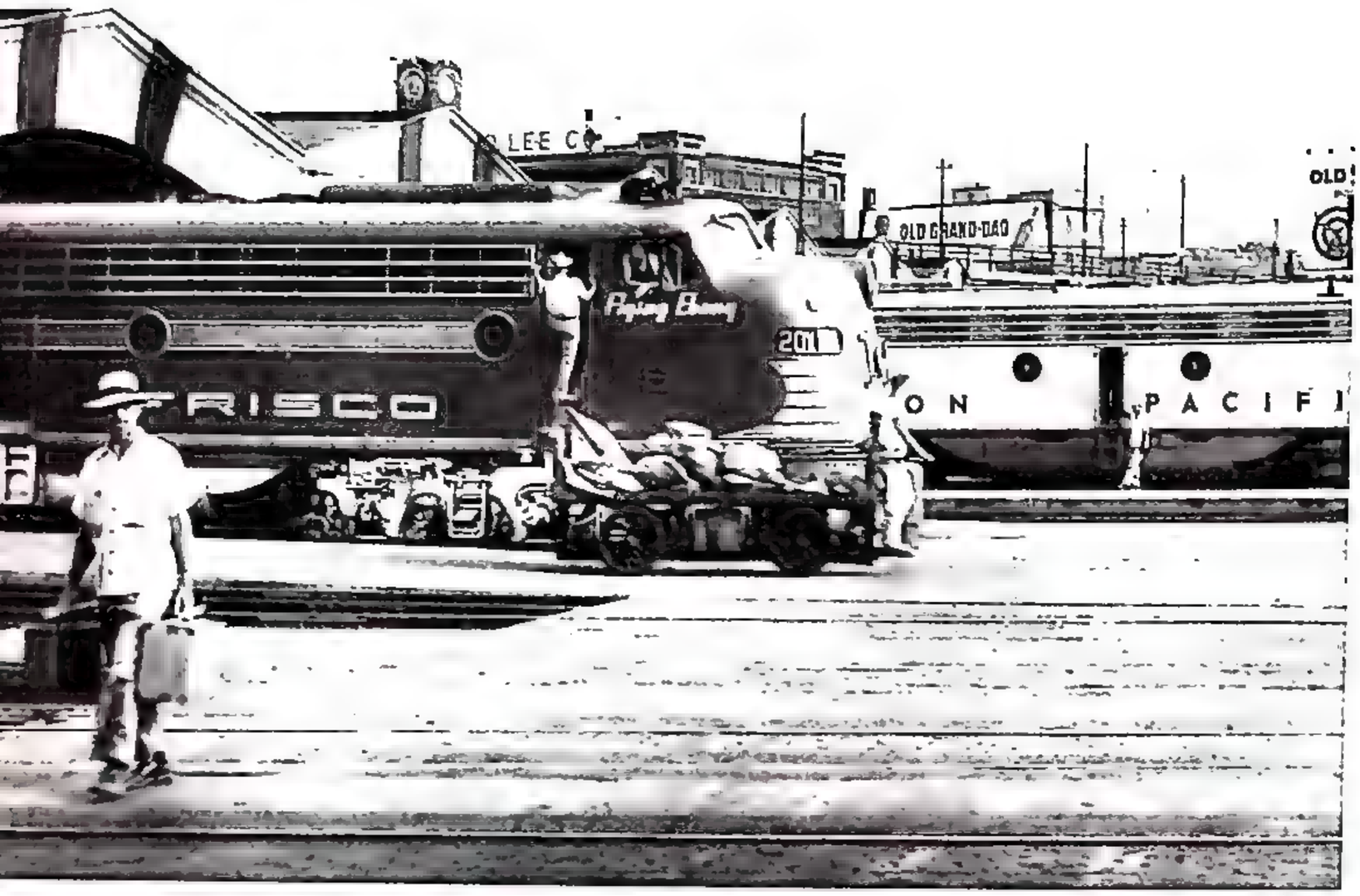
"The RPO must've been pretty fragrant," I offered. "It wasn't too bad," Corben replied. "We'd all shower at the end of a run. You could hardly get into bed without taking a shower first."

The clerks didn't complain much about the dirt—it was part of the job, and the attractions of life on the RPO's outweighed it. Further, Zimmerman observed, many of them grew up in homes without central heating, so they were better adapted to discomfort than people are today.

The RPO wasn't without its share of danger, too, and that was particularly true when performing exchanges on the fly—kicking out pouches from the train at small towns and picking up pouches from trackside cranes.

The potential danger started even before the catch was made: many were the times when the catcher arm was swung out too soon, only to get torn off by a bridge abutment and ricochet off the side of the car. From time to time, windows were broken in such mishaps, occasionally in the passenger cars behind the RPO. A clerk needed to know exactly where he was in order to deploy the arm, and while lineside landmarks became familiar enough after a few runs, it was much harder at night to know when an exchange was coming. Engineers were supposed to blow one long whistle blast when approaching a crane, but they didn't always do so.

Marvin Treadway, a KC & Memphis veteran, said, "A lot of guys were uncanny at knowing when an exchange was coming. They'd feel us cross over switch points, or they'd hear the train echoing



Bill Calvin

Roy Inman

Marvin Treadway (left in photo above, with his hand on the catcher arm of KCS RPO 30) and John Pirog, both veterans of the KC & Memphis RPO on the Frisco, reminisce at Baldwin City. Union Pacific (top, in 1964) was an important Kansas City connection for Frisco's Memphis-K.C. trains.

off a grain elevator. There was one fellow I worked with, and I'd be looking around, sort of knowing it was about time for a catch . . . but this guy would work right along, head down, and then he'd just go to the door at exactly the right time, open it up, put out the arm, and *bang*! He was very good at it."

Clarence Whitaker of the Alb remembered one potentially disastrous catch he made on No. 8, Santa Fe's *Fast Mail*. "It makes a lot of noise when you catch a pouch, so I didn't even know a lock had come flying off, right past my head. It ricocheted off the wall and ended up in a pigeonhole. One of the other guys saw or felt it go by him and shouted, 'What's going on here?' I didn't know, because I never saw or heard a thing."

These mishaps weren't uncommon, and it seems everyone has a story. Herb Crawford told about "going west on 7, it's Christmas time, and there's a lot of mail. Bill Swope, he's the guy tending local for [an exchange at] Strong City, Kansas. I wasn't watching until I heard him make an oath, and he slammed a piece of iron a couple feet long down on the floor—that was the only thing left of the catcher. The pivot arm had broken in two, and he was just ashen gray, because he'd been leaning on that hook for the catch, see, and when that hook leaves the door, there's nothing to keep you inside the car. I asked him, What did you do when that happened? And he said, 'I just pushed on that catcher arm as hard as I could to get back in.'"

The danger of the job led a group of Kansas City-based railway mail clerks to form their own hospitalization group in 1939. Now known as the Government Employees Hospital Association, it's one of the largest providers of health insurance to federal workers.

It wasn't just the catches that were dangerous—so were the throws. Clarence Whitaker told of throwing a pouch off at a small town and barely missing a man on the station platform, reading a newspaper. "He never even saw it!" He went on to relate a story of a place with two outhouses near the station, "and we'd always try to hit one of them as we threw the pouch out. We hit that sucker one day, and it must've made a lot of noise, because some guy comes out of there, looking like he'd been shot from a cannon!"

Often, the RPO clerks made friends with the local postmasters, even if they never met them in person. One example was Myrtle Clare in Holcomb, Kans., a minor character in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Whitaker says she used to put a cake in the pouch sometimes for the RPO crew.

Exchanges on the fly didn't just handle mail between small towns and big cities; they also carried the local mail from one town to the next. So, if the exchange points were close together, it could tax the coordination and organization skills of an RPO clerk. George Corben says the Alb exchanged mail at Gardner, Kans., and again at Edgerton, just 5 miles down the line.

"At 65 to 85 miles an hour, there's no time to spare," he recalled. "The local clerk would exchange at Gardner, take the pouch to the table, unlocking the top strap as he went. He dumped the contents on the table as he undid the middle strap, and called for [Edgerton] newspapers. The mail from Gardner for Edgerton would be tossed in the Edgerton pouch, and then he cinched and closed the middle strap, and started for the door, pausing at the Kansas case to collect any last-minute Edgerton letters. He'd strap and lock the top while watching landmarks through the door, position himself in the door, his back to the forward wall, and bend around to see the position of the Edgerton pouch on the crane. He'd swing the catcher arm out and kick the dispatch pouch while pulling down on the catcher arm handle, and bring the pouch into the car. Then he'd repeat the process for Wellsville," another 5 miles down the line.

For all the potential danger, these exchanges almost always went well, and when they did, there was a kind of poetry about it. In the coordinated movements of the RPO clerk, the drama and dust of impact, and the poignant spec-

A mail-slinger's glossary

Bag: Generic term that embraces sacks and pouches
Carry by: To miss an on-the-fly exchange at an on-line town
Case: An array of pigeonholes, 10 or 11 pigenholes high and 4 to 12 pigenholes wide, used to sort mail; invariably on the wall of the RPO
Catch: As a noun, local mail on lineside cranes. As a verb, to snare such mail
Direct bag: Bags for large towns on and beyond the line; often rides in a storage car
Direct package: Each state served by the line has at least one case in the RPO, and these cases are divided into boxes for each city and large town. When a box is full, its contents are tied out and become known as a "direct package"
Dress a rack: Hang the pouches on the racks, the opposite of "pull a rack"
Going stuck: Not getting the mail sorted and locked out by the end of the run or before a scheduled exchange. This unworked mail has to go to the local post office or Postal Transportation Service terminal for sorting, resulting in possible delivery delays
Header: Case labels. Must be changed for each run, since a car is used on multiple lines
Hickies: Demerits. A clerk who accumulated enough could be subject to reduced pay or disciplinary action
Line makeup: Mail destined for another RPO line. Given its own pigeonhole in the letter case, it's tied out and transferred at the appropriate exchange point
Lock out: To close a pouch or sack and lock it up for delivery or exchange
Mail slinger: Postal clerk
PL&R: Postal Laws and Regulations, also known as "the Black Book"
Post Office Department/Postal Service: The Post Office was a cabinet department until 1971, when it was reorganized for efficiency reasons as the U.S. Postal Service, a quasi-public corporation
Pouch: Canvas bag for first-class mail; came in three sizes
Pull a rack: Remove and lock out all pouches, the opposite of "dress a rack"
Railway Mail Service: Branch of the Post Office Department responsible for railway mail, beginning in 1869. In 1949, it was replaced by the Postal Transportation Service, a name which foreshadowed changes in the transport of mail
Railway Post Office: Bonafide, official post offices on rails. They could occupy anything from a 15-foot "apartment" in a combination car, to an entire 60-foot or (in rare instances) 85-foot car. The cars were owned by the railroads and leased to the Post Office Department
Rob a box: To empty a mailbox. RPO clerks most often performed this duty at station stops, since many stations had mailboxes on the platform
Sack: Canvas bag for other than first-class mail, closed with a cord. Came in three lengths, with same circumference
Scheme: The route by which mail reaches its destination post office. Every pair of post offices has a unique scheme
Shin-peeler: A large bag or sack that's so heavy it can only be dragged
Storage pouch: Mail to be delivered as a direct delivery to an on-line town, or for transfer to another RPO route, the opposite of working mail
Working pouch: Mail to be sorted en route, the opposite of storage mail

tacle of the small-town postmaster standing trackside while the express thundered by, too important to stop for his little burg, the nonstop exchange was a ritual of rural America that's been lost forever.

Comic opera

Although the job was often stressful and dangerous, sometimes those elements were mixed with an almost slapstick aspect, particularly with the guns the clerks carried.

One of the men recalled a colleague who went in for his annual examination. "You had to bring your gun in for the exam, and this guy pulls his piece out of the grip and the chamber falls on the floor! It didn't have any shells in it, but it was pretty clear it was in no shape to be used. The examiner asks him why he didn't get it fixed, and he says, 'I didn't know I was supposed to!' A lot of guys had no business carrying guns."

The standard-issue weapon was a .38 snub-nosed revolver, a so-called "banker's special." None of the men I spoke with ever had to use one in the line of duty, and Ray Eble doubts they would have been much good anyway. He told a story about his train stopping next to a cornfield, "I don't know for what. But here's these real lush roasting ears, right next to the train, so I went over and pulled me half a dozen. The old foreman, he thought he'd have some fun, so he gets out his .38 and shoots it in the air, but you could hardly hear that peashooter!"

"Remember Herman Walsh?" asked Lester Brown. "He could write as neat as a printed page, and he kept his schemes and schedules just so. One morning, he got down to Memphis and emptied his gun, but he didn't count the shells. He put the gun back together, and for some reason he pulled the trigger—and it went off, right through all his schemes and schedules! So when he got back to Kansas City the next day, he requested a new set, saying, 'Mine are all shot to hell!'"

The guns were a throwback to days of Wild West outlaws, but the clerks had them until the end, mostly because of the valuable registered mail the RPO's carried. Eble recalled how the Tucumcari & El Paso carried the payroll for Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. "This was back in the days when they paid in cash. When I worked the KC & Tucum, I'd sign for it in the Red Room [the Registered Room at Kansas City Union Station], and they tell me

J. David Ingles collection

Rock Island heavyweight RPO 720, lettered for the *Golden State* and pictured "off-line" at Omaha in 1953, served the KC & Tucum RPO route to Tucumcari, and west on SP to El Paso.

Clinton W. Morgan

Roy Inman

Lester Brown (at left, photo at left) chats with George Corben on KCS 30. Corben, Herb Crawford, and Clarence Whitaker are veterans of the KC & Alb Eastern Division route on the Santa Fe, one of whose RMS Western Division employees has made an on-the-fly catch from the crane at Los Cerrillos, N.Mex., on January 27, 1962 (above), as train 18, the combined *Super Chief-El Capitan*, flies east from Albuquerque.

there's $250,000 in the payroll. So I take it out to the train in KC, armed only with my trusty .38, but when I worked the Tucum & El Paso I find we get to Alamogordo, and there's 40 MP's waiting with Tommy guns!" Evidently the Air Force attached more importance to the payroll than the Red Room did.

"I used to lie around and try to figure out how I could rob that payroll," Eble said nonchalantly. "And I thought that would be easy pickings, probably fifty miles north of the Mexican border."

R.I.P., RPO

The end of railway mail had been coming for a long time before most of the remaining routes were discontinued in 1967 and 1968. It's often said that the termination of postal contracts killed the passenger trains, but that's only true for those relative few varnish runs that still existed in the late 1960's. In fact, automotive competition had forced the demise of many local trains since the 1920's, with a corresponding drop in the number of routes that could be covered by RPO's.

Between 1925 and 1965, the number of RPO routes dwindled from 1,550 to just 190. The automobile also brought suburban sprawl, particularly after World War II, and as a result, by 1965 only 31 percent of the nation's post offices were served by rail. Like a log being devoured by termites, the structure eventually collapsed from all the holes. The growing use of air mail also played a part in the RPO's end, but it's unlikely that airmail alone would have supplanted a ubiquitous and healthy railroad route system.

From the Post Office Department's

operational perspective, the question wasn't so much the mode of transport, it was whether the mail would be carried "closed pouch" or sorted en route. Ultimately, the declining number of passenger trains made the decision for them, and they were forced to adopt a closed-pouch system.

The Post Office Department had other reasons for abandoning railway mail. High-speed sorting and canceling machines were introduced in the 1950's, and other technologies like optical character readers were on the way. The mail was being mechanized, and it didn't make sense to put such equipment on trains. Then there was the human angle. George Corben pointed out that missed connections between trains could result in the Post Office paying RPO clerks for less work en route, but if trucks or planes missed their connections, the clerks could simply be sent home. In addition, an inside clerk could go home when the day's sorting was done, thus saving overtime.

Cities with good air service didn't see much difference in delivery speed, since the reduced long-haul transit time was offset by the time required for stationary sorting, and for trucking between the airport and downtown. Rural areas, however, often received worse mail service after the RPO's disappeared, and Lester Brown offered a case in point: "On my last run on the KC & Alb, I got my hair cut in La Junta. The barber gave me an order for the barber supply house in Kansas City, and he said, 'Take this, so it can be delivered tomorrow morning.' The barber supply house gets the order in the morning, fills it in time for the afternoon mail, and the barber in La Junta has his supplies 36 hours after the order was sent in." When trucks took over the same route, the letters weren't sorted until they reached Kansas City, resulting in a full day's delay, even though the time in transit was about the same.

Mechanization, toll-free phone numbers, the Internet, and premium-priced air express would one day combine to restore the level of service the La Junta barber once enjoyed, but it would take three decades and it would cost much more.

On those last few runs, the RPO's rattled along mostly empty, their traffic already diverted to trucks and planes. George Corben made his last runs on the Alb, trains 19 and 20, on October 5 and 6, 1967. "I had California pouches on Number 19, but only a paltry 20 or 30. I was out of work before we got to Argentine [barely 4 miles], and spent most of the trip reminiscing and shooting movies." The films include a spectacular shot of a rainbow that George spotted the next day near Cimarron, Kans., where he made No. 20's last catch. Framed by the open door of the RPO, it's a powerful image of a speeding train beneath a limitless High Plains sky. Rainbows are often taken for symbols of promise, but on this last run, it only seemed to mock the hapless clerks.

Santa Fe 20 arrived in Kansas City that night in a cold rain, three minutes ahead of schedule. Corben returned to Union Station the next day, still in the rain, to shoot more movies of the last RPO's. Then he went home. An era in his life, and the nation's, was ending.

If there was any symbolism to that last-run rainbow, it didn't foretell a happy later career with the Postal Service for Corben. He didn't have enough seniority for a good position in "the Big House," as he called the General Post Office in Kansas City, so he went back to school and became a computer programmer. Most of the other men went inside, and most of them didn't like it. They missed the freedom of the road, and there wasn't enough to do. Other clerks sometimes resented them, apparently because they worked too fast. Their elite status and the pace of work on the Railway Mail had spoiled them for anything else.

Herb Crawford offered one bright note, though: "When we went into the post office, I heard other clerks say, 'I can tell an RPO guy, because they're rocking back and forth while they're sorting the mail.'" His colleagues at the table laughed, because they all kept their sea legs after leaving the road, too.

I asked if the men ever dream about it, if they wake up thinking they're still throwing mail in the RPO. At least two admitted they do. The work, the sights, the sounds, and wheels underfoot are a powerful elixir. It's not the kind of thing that can ever really leave you.

Herb wanted to offer me a closing observation about the *esprit de corps* that prevailed in the Railway Mail Service. He said he never experienced anything like it elsewhere in his career, and the other men nodded in agreement. Echoes of Shakespeare's *Henry V* come to mind: "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers." It may sound hackneyed, but it fits. How many other groups of co-workers still get together after almost 40 years?

"The closest thing I ever saw to it was the Marines," said George. "Yeah," Herb agreed, "we really did look out for each other." To which Ray Elbe answered, deadpan as ever, "We did?"

It was just Ray being Ray, because he's as serious as anyone about his life's work for the Railway Mail Service. And I, as Henry V might've said, can almost think myself accursed that I wasn't there to see it. ■

Ed Wojtas

Almost lost in a sea of mail and express carts at Kansas City Union Station, an E8 and a GP9 wait to leave town in the early 1960's with Wabash train 210, the *City of St. Louis*, which has arrived off the Union Pacific from Denver with its customary large volume of mail to exchange.

More on our Web site

Take a look at some of the movies of RPO's in their last days shot by veteran George Corben in the 1960's at www.classictrainsmag.com

Mrs. Adkins meets No. 51

The Postmistress of Caliente, Calif., keeps her daily appointment with SP's *San Joaquin Daylight*

Photos and captions by Richard Steinheimer

It's about 9:30 on a December 1966 morning at tiny Caliente, Calif., and the winter tule fog is beginning to burn off. Postmistress Ina M. Adkins leaves her little post office and crosses the county road and Southern Pacific tracks to hang a mail pouch for SP train 51, the northbound *San Joaquin Daylight*. Up in the Techachapi Mountains, above the horseshoe curve that circles the town, can be heard the "ringing" sounds of a train descending the grade toward Caliente. It's No. 51, still about 15 minutes away.

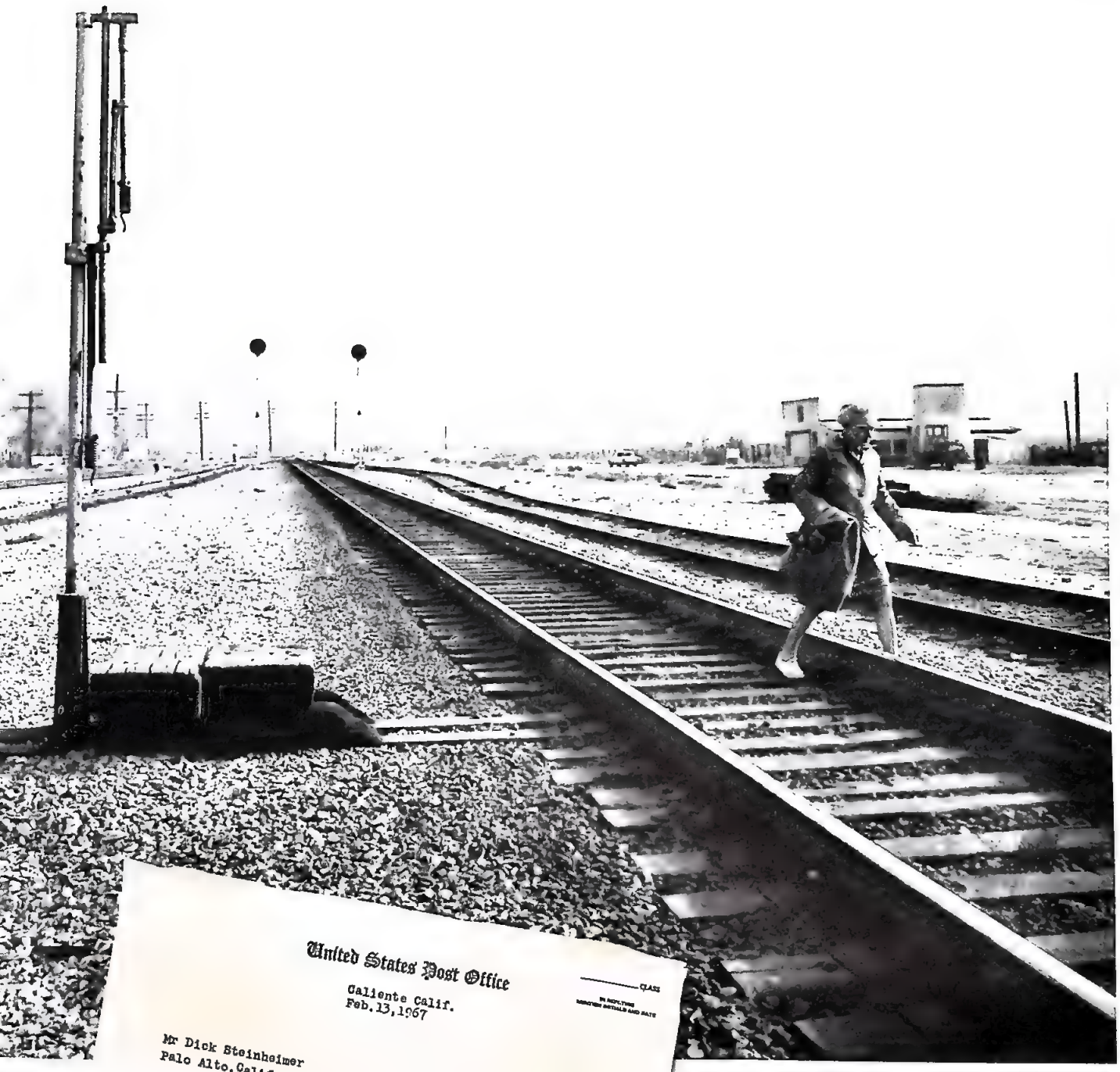
Carrying her pouch-hanging pole, Mrs. Adkins approaches the mail crane, just as she has done here for the past 15 years.

With the top of the pouch hung from the upper arm, Mrs. Adkins raises that arm and prepares to reach for the lower one.

S.F. & LOS ANGELES,
TR 51
SEP 29
1967
R.P.O.
MAIL BY
Rail

The the upper arm is kept in place by the raising of the lower arm, to which she starts to attach the bottom of the pouch.

With the weight of the bag holding the arms outstretched, Mrs. Adkins starts back for the warmth of the post office.



United States Post Office

Caliente Calif.
Feb.13,1967

Mr Dick Steinheimer
Palo Alto,Calif.

Dear Sir;

I do thank you for the pictures,I did'nt realize you took so many. They turned out real good,even though it was afoggy,chilly day. The one of the train catching the pouch, with the arms of the crane still in position,is fantastic.

I have been here since April 1 1951, so have hung a few pouches. If you are interested I have a little data on the origin of the Caliente post office,formerly known as Allens Camp.

Thank you, and stop in sometime when in Caliente.

Thank you,
Mrs Ina M Adkins

Back from the post office comes Mrs. Adkins to retrieve the bag of incoming mail from Los Angeles that an RPO crewman threw off just before he caught the outbound pouch. Come mid-afternoon, the ritual will be enacted again when the southbound *San Joaquin Daylight* comes through.

RPO rainbow

A sampling of mail-car colors and configurations

By Robert S. McGonigal

Walter A. Peters

Louis A. Marre

SELF-PROPELLED: Motor car 2508 and trailer 2551 form GM&O train 9, stopped at Roodhouse, Ill., on January 16, 1960. St. Louis Car built both in 1928, with EMC providing power equipment for RPO-baggage-coach 2508. That car's mail area was long ago converted to baggage/express space, so the Bloomington (Ill.) & Kansas City RPO is housed in 2551's 30-foot apartment. Rock Island 9004 is running as Memphis-Amarillo train 23 at Howe, Okla., on September 6, 1961. Although 9004 has the standard body of a Budd Co. RPO-baggage-coach RDC3, it was built with baggage doors blanked off—an expanded mail apartment for the Memphis & McAlester (Okla.) RPO occupies the baggage area.

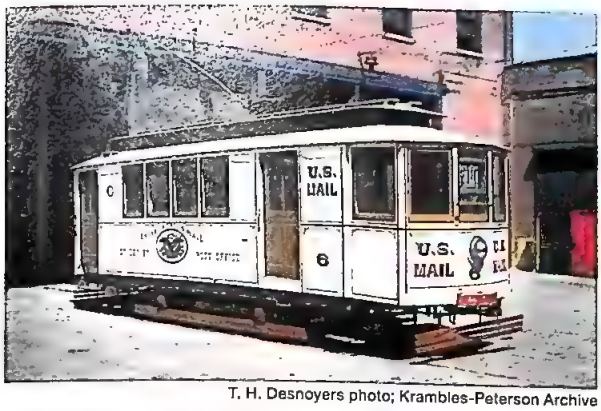
John S. Ingles

HALF & HALF, STANDARD: Tuscan red Norfolk & Western class BMf No. 1201, built by Bethlehem Steel in 1913, is a standard (heavyweight) car with a baggage section and a 30-foot RPO apartment.

J. David Ingles

HALF & HALF, STREAMLINED: Spokane, Portland & Seattle baggage-mail car 32 (named for George B. Armstrong, founder of the Railway Mail Service) began life as Katy 1000; Pullman-Standard built it in 1948.

MAIL BY Rail



T. H. Desnoyers photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive

TRACTION: Streetcar RPO's began in 1892-93, ended in 1915; Chicago Surface Lines recalled the era in 1946 by restoring car 6 (pictured above in '58). Interurban RPO's lasted until 1950, when two lines on Pacific Electric quit. Indiana Railroad car 376 covered the Fort Wayne & New Castle RPO until that line was ended in 1941.

Frank E. Butts photo; Krambles-Peterson Archive

J. David Ingles

THE CLASSIC: The quintessential mail-car configuration, the one no self-respecting *Fast Mail* would be without, is the heavyweight, 60-foot "full" RPO. Baltimore & Ohio class H-9 No. 78 is a 1913 Pullman product. Sister 81 is in the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania collection.

Jerry A. Pinkepank

COZY QUARTERS: Squeezed into one end of Long Island Rail Road car 7737 is a 15-foot RPO section, smallest of the three standard sizes (15, 30, and 60 feet); the rest of the Pennsy B60-style car is for baggage.

J. David Ingles

BIGGEST: The last word in RPO development—the 85-foot lightweight car—is represented by Union Pacific 5900 (ACF, 1949). Inside is a standard 60-foot postal apartment plus a mail-storage area.

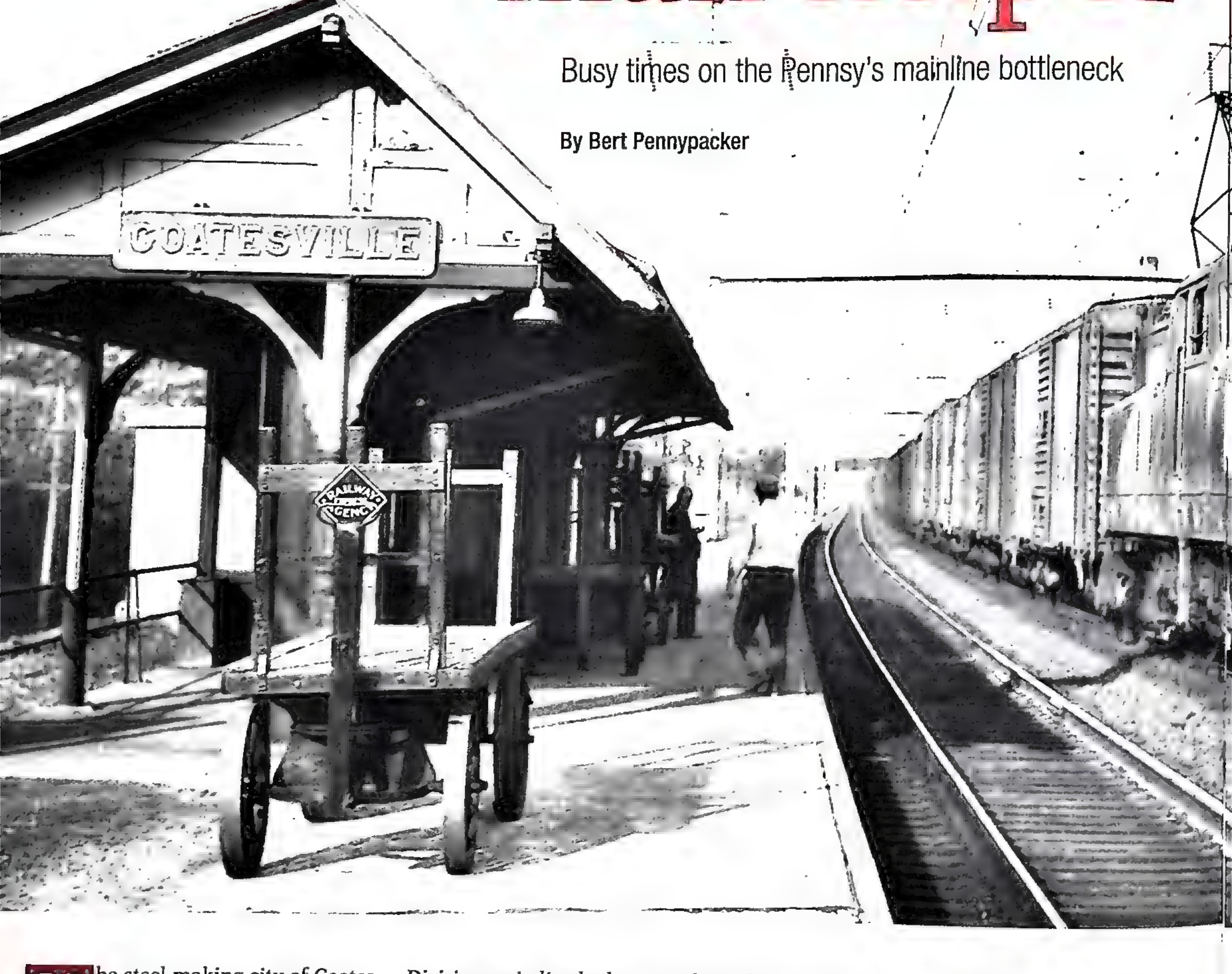
J. David Ingles

LAST OF A LONG LINE: Santa Fe got the final all-new RPO cars, a dozen stainless-steel 60-footers built by Budd in May-June 1964. The first car in that order, No. 99, is second in a line of 25 stored mail cars at Chillicothe, Ill., on January 20, 1968. Put out of work by the massive Railway Post Office discontinuances of 1967, some of these cars went east to the New Haven, briefly, until RPO's retreated from that road too.

Tales from a Coatesville mail helper

Busy times on the Pennsy's mainline bottleneck

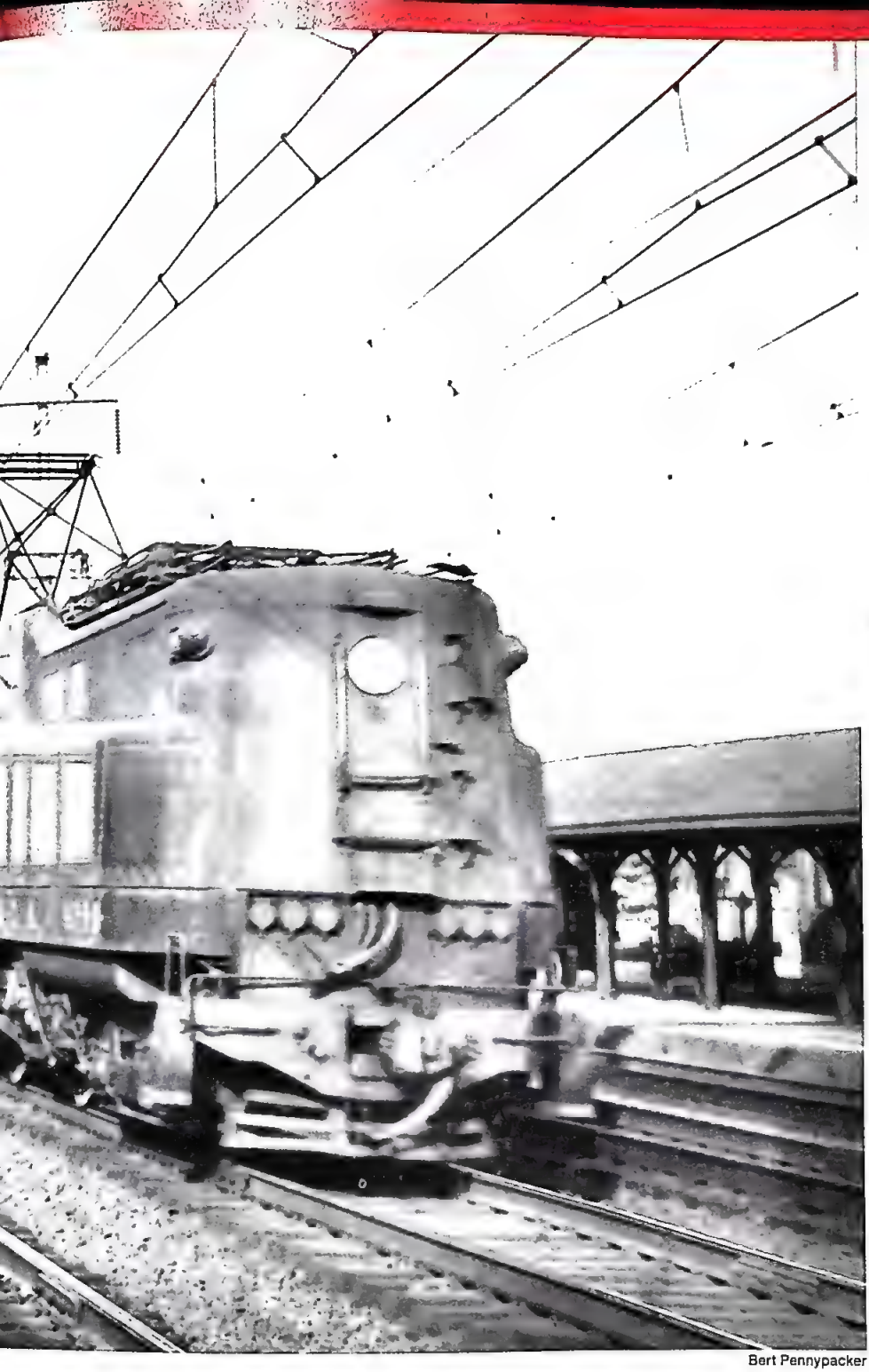
By Bert Pennypacker



The steel-making city of Coatesville, Pa., where I lived throughout the 1940's, was a busy spot on the Pennsylvania Railroad's Philadelphia-Pittsburgh main line. Located 38.6 miles west of Philadelphia, Coatesville stood astride a 9.3-mile-long, four-track bottleneck that linked low-grade freight lines which diverged from the main line 3.6 miles to the east at Thorndale and 5.7 miles to the west at Parkesburg. All trains, passenger and freight, that plied the Philadelphia Division main line had to pass through Coatesville.

The daily parade of passenger trains included Pennsy's great fleet of long-distance east-west limiteds and expresses to Harrisburg, Buffalo and Erie, and Pittsburgh, and even a few M.U. locals. While as many as 28 trains made station stops at Coatesville, the greater number, 61, of daily passenger trains cruised right by with their gold-striped GG1 electrics making a steady 75 mph. We found that the timing for a limited was exactly 20 minutes from the Paoli stop, 18.6 miles east on the four-track main line. Three Chicago limiteds did stop at Coatesville: train 5, the westbound *Pennsylvania Limited*, and 54, the eastbound *Gotham Limited*, every day, plus Sundays-only train 42, the eastbound *Rainbow*.

Freight traffic, averaging about 60 trains a day, rumbled past on center tracks 2 and 3. The freights were hauled by an assortment of some GG1's, many P5a's, and such steam classes as



Bert Pennypacker

MAIL BY Rail

As men and carts await the next mail-carrying train on track 4, a streamlined P5a electric grinds upgrade with a westbound freight on track 3. Although many freights got off the main line in favor of low-grade lines to the east and west, they all had to come through Coatesville. Author Pennypacker was a dozen years removed from his mail-helper job when he stood beside the PRR main line at Cove, Pa., in 1952.

M1 4-8-2 and L1s 2-8-2 types. Westbounds often had L1s pushers that ran from Thorndale to either Parkesburg or Gap. Sandwiched in between all the passenger trains on outside tracks 1 and 4, local freights scurried by with H9s 2-8-0's out of Thorndale Yard.

All this action attracted my attention as I spent hours each day hanging around the depot and becoming familiar with everything that passed by. This soon led to my acquaintanceship with Ed Sculmeister, the kindly old man who had the contract to haul the U.S. Mail between the local post office and the PRR station, as well as loading it onto trains. His friendship, in turn, took me directly into my first job. While I still was a high-school student, Mr. Schulmeister took me on as his helper, offering the fabulous salary of one dollar per day.

Well, this money in 1940 was fine, but was incidental when compared to the thrill and feeling of importance that came with handling the U.S. Mail. Moreover, I was participating in the great transportation system that was the Pennsylvania Railroad. Even though my contribution was infinitesimal, trains were obliged to wait until I had them loaded.

My schedule turned out to be horrendous, but I did not mind the starting time of 4:12 a.m. with train 605, which usually disgorged a truckload of mailbags. The early-morning stint included five trains to be taken care of, then it was home for a quick breakfast

John Pickett

Blowing steam from its train-heating boiler, GG1 4838 races east on track 1 in May 1952 at Thorndale, the east end of PRR's mainline bottleneck. Tracks rising at right are part of the low-grade freight line to Morrisville, Pa.

and off to school. Then, after class, duty called me back to the post office with another five trains to be serviced, ending with No. 24 at 7:29 p.m. and home to an early bedtime. It was a rigorous schedule, yet I enjoyed it and felt proud of my contribution to both the railroad's and city's commercial life.

Torn-up letters, smelly pigeon crates

One of our early-morning trains was No. 13, the *Southwestern Mail* to St. Louis, which came through about 5:25 a.m., delivering six pouches on the fly from its Railway Post Office car. The pouches were thrown off at speed, just west of the station platform. After 13 came through, there we would be, in the predawn darkness with a flashlight, searching the ground for those pouches.

In several instances, a pouch would bounce back under the wheels of the speeding train, causing letters and parts of letters to be scattered over the landscape, after which a crew had to be sent out from the Coatesville post office to find as much of the mail as they could. After one such calamity, the Post Office Department told the railroad to slow the *Southwestern Mail* to 35 mph passing Coatesville to ensure the safe delivery of mail pouches on the fly.

Another bit of occasional difficulty with which we had to contend involved the stopping of long trains at our relatively short, 600-foot station platform, so that both the mail car and passenger cars were on the platform. As a train came into the station, the conductor often sounded one bell on the communicating cord to indicate to the engineer when to stop. Even so, the mail car sometimes was carried beyond the end of the platform, at which time I took the bossy opportunity to wave my arms and yell, "Back 'er up!" This wasted precious time, but the train crew had no choice, since the train could not depart without the mail.

One morning, train 580, the *Southern Express* from Erie, Pa., came along and stopped with its RPO door beyond the end of the platform. Jack Johnson, the conductor, came running down the platform and told us he had an official's car on the rear end. He did not want his engineer to get in trouble by backing up, so he offered to help carry our mail the short distance to the RPO door. "Never mind," I told Jack, "We'll do it." So we dragged our few mailbags off the end of the platform, dropping about two feet to the ground alongside the tracks. But now, the RPO doorway was above our heads, meaning we had to fling the mailbags up through the air and into the car. The RPO clerk then dropped his incoming mailbags down to us. Thus ended another little adventure in the daily routine of good mail service.

While you would expect to find such items as mailbags, passengers' baggage, and bundles of newspapers in Pennsy's baggage cars, you might be surprised at certain times to also find such diverse things as fresh cut flowers in large boxes, a huge wooden shipping crate containing a casket and corpse, and, of all things, live homing pigeons in barred wooden crates. The birds were occasionally sent out by Philadelphia breeders to distant places for training, and therein lies a tale.

Two crates of the winged, cooing creatures often would arrive on train 25, the *Metropolitan* to Pittsburgh, at 10:30 a.m. Attached to each crate was a note addressed to the station agent, saying to release the birds upon arrival. Upon escaping from their cages and fluttering upward, the birds formed into groups. They circled around several times, then headed east toward Philadelphia. The empty crates were left to be returned on an eastbound

Rail mail's two titans

Nearly one-fourth of all mail went by PRR or NYC

The Railway Mail Service was organized into 15 geographic divisions, covering the entire country. All were defined by groups of states—with two exceptions. The Fifteenth Division was defined by the main lines of the Pennsylvania Railroad from New York City through Pittsburgh to Chicago, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. The Ninth Division was defined principally by the New York Central's main lines between New York and Chicago (plus the lower peninsula of Michigan). Such was the dominance of the two great Northeast-Midwest carriers.

In the early 1920's, the heyday of the railway mail system, the PRR led all other railroad systems in mail haulage. The NYC was a close second, and the Southern Railway a distant third. Among Northeastern lines, other than the two giants, only the Baltimore & Ohio ranked in the top 15. The PRR and NYC, together, accounted for nearly one-fourth of the total national haul.

The Pennsy lines were part of the wider postal corridor from the Northeast to the Middle West. The RPO's in that corridor handled more than half the nation's total mail haul. PRR dominated the haul across the Coastal Plain and the Appalachians, although NYC was a close competitor. On the other hand, Central dominated the haul across the Middle West, with Pennsy a close second. NYC's New York & Chicago run, west of Cleveland, carried somewhat more RPO and storage space than PRR's Pittsburgh & Chicago; but the Michigan Central's Detroit & Chicago and the Big Four's Chicago & Cincinnati were big factors in NYC's dominance.

The Central hauled most of the direct mail between New York and Chicago, as well as mail from New York destined for beyond Chicago. NYC also carried most of the foreign mail, through the port of New York, not only from Chicago business firms, but also from the millions of new European immigrants in the Midwest. In contrast, PRR strongly dominated the postal flow between New York and the growing South and Southwest, through Washington and St. Louis. And it almost completely dominated the flow from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to the West.

At the great St. Louis gateway, PRR was the major connection to and from the Northeast. In fact, the "Pitts & Saint Lou" handled more mail at St. Louis than the combined Cleveland & St. Louis (NYC), Cincinnati & St. Louis (B&O), and the Toledo & St. Louis (Wabash).

A look at the Chicago gateway confirms the idea that the Pennsy trunk lines served not only their immediate territory, but the whole nation. Clerks on the Pittsburgh & Chicago pouched connecting trains to the west on 25 different RPO's, plus direct pouches for such remote runs as the Santa Fe's Ashfork & Los Angeles, UP's Omaha & Ogden, SP's Ogden & San Francisco, and Burlington's Omaha & Denver. The largest connecting run at Chicago was the Milwaukee Road's Chicago & Minneapolis. Part of the northern transcontinental corridor through the Twin Cities to Seattle, the "Chic & Min" was the heaviest mail run in the country after the Pennsy, NYC, and New Haven main lines out of New York City.

The five biggest Pennsy RPO lines—the New York & Washington, New York & Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh & Chicago, Pittsburgh & St. Louis, and Pittsburgh & Cincinnati—put up some impressive numbers. They handled nearly one-tenth of the total railway mail haul on all U.S. railroads. Each of the five trunk RPO's carried two 60-foot cars on at least one pair of trains, along with single 60-footers on many other trains. More than 1,300 clerks worked in the cars—almost one-tenth of all the road clerks in the U.S. railway mail system. About 1,400 road clerks ran on the PRR; they manned more than 350 RPO trains on an average day, on 9,000 route-miles—one of every 12 RPO trains in the country! Twenty-two million people—more than one-fifth of America's 1920 population—lived in the counties along the five RPO's.

Railway Mail Service Library

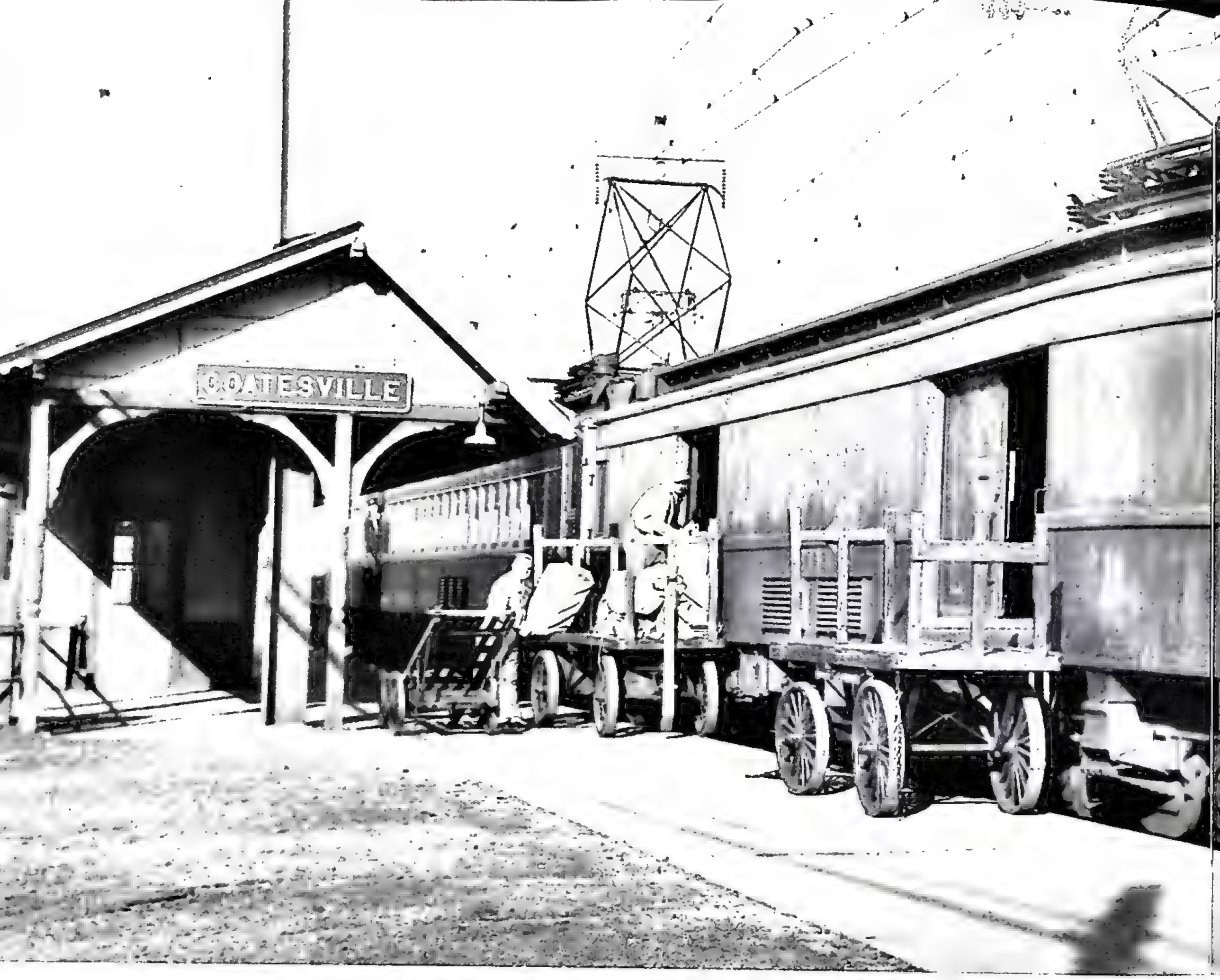
A famous 1944 magazine ad showed the inner workings of the *20th Century*'s RPO.

Workhorses, not famous name trains, carried most of the mail in and out of New York's Penn Station. Unnamed trains such as No. 11 and No. 13 on the New York & Pittsburgh, or No. 105 on the New York & Washington pulled out with double 60-foot RPO's and strings of storage cars. The *Broadway Limited*, *Manhattan Limited*, and *St. Louisan* were famous trains that carried RPO's (though the *Broadway* in those days had only a 15-foot apartment). Other premier trains had no mail at all.

Adapted from "Heyday of the RPO System on the Pennsylvania Railroad," by John R. Borchert, published in Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter 1999) of The Keystone, *the journal of the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical & Historical Society. Used with permission.*

Chuck Blardone collection

PRR 6599, one of five 1964 conversions from non-mail cars, was the last RPO to enter service.



Philadelphia-Lancaster local 627, formed of three MP54-family multiple-unit cars, waits at Coatesville for men to load mail and express aboard car 5280 on a 1946 afternoon.

train, which was No. 8, due at 5:32 that afternoon. We loaded a large volume of mailbags onto train 8 at both doors of the baggage car. I handled the rear door alone, while Ed Schulmeister and Harry Taylor, the train baggageman, worked the other door. Placing the mail inside the car, I put the two empty pigeon crates in last.

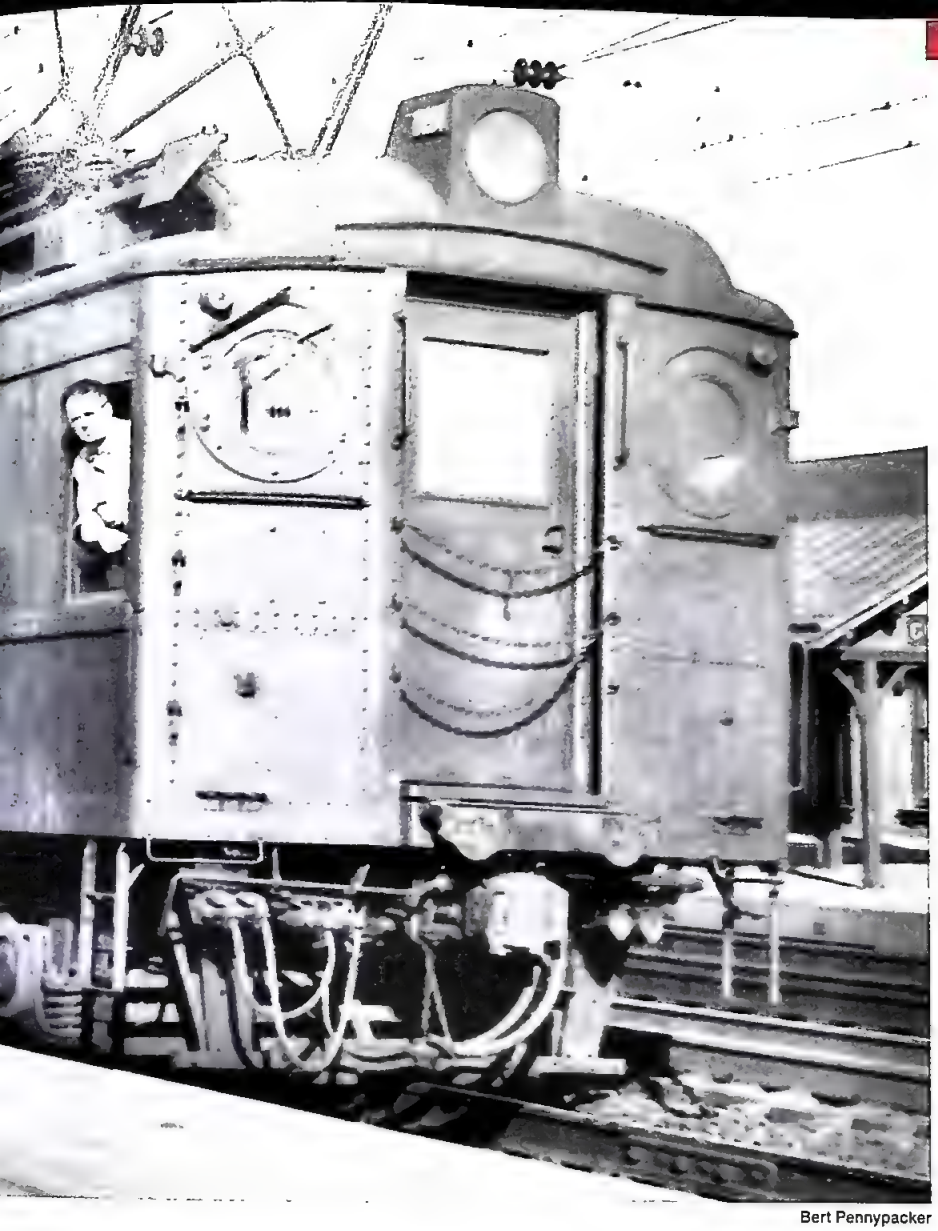
With our work completed, train 8 got under way. Then the unexpected happened. As the baggage car moved along the platform, the two empty pigeon crates came flying out the car doorway! Not wanting the smelly crates in his car, Harry Taylor kicked them out and I, of course, cursed him with a few choice words. The crates had to be put onto another train the next day, but in the end, I figured out a way to get even. The next time such pigeon crates showed up, I put them into the baggage car first, then piled the mail all around and on top of them! Good luck, Harry!

On another occasion, a hot summer day, we were busily loading No. 8 when I noticed a gentleman in a business suit and fedora hat standing nearby with a watch in hand. As Harry worked —much faster than usual—he told me that the well-dressed dude was a passenger trainmaster who was timing the delay. It always was my habit to work quickly in order to avoid any delay, but even so, the nearby PTM had no jurisdiction over me, and I cared little about his presence.

Derailment = delayed mail

One evening, as I watched a slow eastbound freight train passing the Coatesville depot, I spied a boxcar with a hotbox. This sent me running to a nearby trackside phone box mounted on a catenary pole, where I called Parkesburg tower to report the trouble. The tower operator told me the crew knew about it and was easing the car down to Thorndale to be set out at the yard there. The next morning, I found out they never made it to Thorndale. Upon reaching Caln interlocking, just short of the yard, the axle gave way and broke off, derailing the car and sending it careening into a catenary pole. Down came the pole, taking the entire catenary structure with it and tying up the whole railroad. Pennsy's mainline bottleneck was blocked.

Since no alternate PRR route existed, long-distance passenger trains were detoured, I think, over the Reading Company to Harrisburg. By afternoon, track 4 had been opened, but the catenary had not been repaired. We learned that trains 32, the *St. Louisan*, and 54, the *Gotham Limited*, had been sent east to Parkesburg, where they were being coupled together into a single train. An L1s 2-8-2 was sent there to haul both trains east on track 4, normally used



Bert Pennypacker

by westbound passenger trains. Since No. 54 had a Coatesville stop and received a mail pouch in its RPO, its boarding passengers and I went over to the westbound platform, along with the mail pouch.

Soon the L1s appeared, chuffing along at a leisurely pace over the big stone-arch bridge west of the station. She swept past the platform and was followed by a coupled GG1 electric, dead in tow, then train 32's long string of passenger cars. Next came a second dead GG1 and the cars of train 54. There I stood, mail pouch in hand, poised and ready to deliver it to 54's RPO. As the train passed, I suddenly realized it was not stopping. No one had notified the Coatesville agent that the train would not stop, and missing a pouch delivery always called for an official explanation to the Post Office Department. Moreover, 54's prospective passengers were out of luck.

My only recourse was to put the pouch in the station ticket office, where it awaited the later arrival of train 8. Then I called our post office and reported the circumstances of the missed pouch. Even though some mail was delayed, that little incident was only a small detail among some 20 hours of major disruptions caused by the wreck at Caln.

Bending the rules

On another occasion, I used unorthodox measures to protect and expedite the mail, but they were not appreciated by Post Office authorities. During the summer months of Daylight Saving Time, train 24, a local from Pittsburgh, was not moved back an hour in the timetable. This meant that it came along at 8:29 p.m. instead of 7:29. That extra hour of waiting seemed like a real chore, so Mr. Schulmeister left me at the depot with the mail and went home. This meant I had to work both the RPO and the baggage-car doors on train 24, quite an effort for one man. I was afraid the conductor might decide to start the train when I completed loading the first door, so I made a point of putting the second cart of mail near the tracks, where it could be plainly seen. This worked out well.

Then came an evening when 24 was running late. I called Parkesburg tower, and the operator told me the train was stopped at Linden, Pa.—on the Williamsport Division, far off its normal route—with a dead diesel. There had been a freight wreck on the Middle Division, and all passenger trains were being detoured over the Bald Eagle Branch between Tyrone and Lock Haven, then down the Williamsport Division to Harrisburg. The detour meant about 45 extra miles of running, so some delay was inevitable, but the fact that train 24 was standing dead 163 miles away meant that I could be stuck all night waiting for her. What was I to do?

My first inclination was to simply leave the mail on the station platform and go home to bed. However, I was responsible for its safety and knew that it had to be attended. I once had a key to the Railway Express office and could have put the mail in there, but I no longer had that key. Then I realized that train 581, the *Northern Express* to Erie, was due to stop at 9:29 p.m. So over to the westbound platform I went with the cart of mail. When 581 came along, I told the surprised baggageman that division headquarters at Harrisburg had OK'ed the mail move and to put the stuff off at Lancaster for train 24. Of course, no one had OK'ed anything —the whole objective was to get the mail off my hands.

Having felt proud of my bright idea, I received a minor jolt several days later when George Eager, the Pennsy's local general agent, asked me what I had done, and said that the postal authorities were displeased with this infraction of regulations. It seems that train 581 was not authorized to carry mail in the baggage car and, even more importantly, pouches addressed to an RPO run were absolutely not to be put aboard any other car. I explained the situation I had faced on that night. Mr. Eager said he would have done the same thing and told me to forget it. So that was that, and I was happy.

Fond memories of this, my first job, still linger with me. I was proud to be even a tiny part of the nation's mail-handling system, serving in the link that connected the Post Office Department with the mighty Pennsylvania Railroad. ■

Snag that bag!

Museums and tourist lines keep RPO history alive

By Karl Zimmermann

Main photo, Steve Glischinski; inset, J. David Ingles

Passengers on a Minnesota Transportation Museum special in 1982 (above) watch a mail pick-up demonstraton on the Milwaukee Road at Dundas, Minn. Today, MTM demonstrates an on-the-fly pickup regularly on its Osceola & St. Croix Valley operation at the ex-Soo Line depot in Osceola, Wis., still using NP car 1102 and the same crane (top inset, in 1997).

Motion is the essence of railways. That's why, at railroad museums, locomotives and trains on the move offer an extra dimension of understanding and interpretation that static exhibits can't equal.

The human perspective also infuses life into a museum's offerings, and both factors come into play at the few sites that preserve the fascinating history of the Railway Post Office. Without a doubt, the most emblematic, stirring moment in RPO operations is the on-the-fly pickup of a mailbag, snagged by the RPO car's catcher arm from a mail crane as the train rushes by. Although the sorting that subsequently happened inside the rolling post offices may have been more instrumental in making the Railway Mail Service remarkably efficient, the pickup had the drama . . . and still does, at the museums where it is demonstrated.

Among them is the Osceola & St. Croix Valley Railroad, an affiliate of the Minnesota Transportation Museum at Osceola, Wis., on a remnant of the former Soo Line's Minneapolis-Sault Ste. Marie line. On select O&StCV trains, mail is snagged on the fly. The catcher arm is swung out from a "triple combine," Northern Pacific 1102, built in 1914 by Pullman. In its final (and current) configuration, this car—once at home on lightly traveled branch lines—contains coach seats, a baggage area, and a 15-foot RPO section. Although small, the mail section is fully equipped with letter case, mail pouches, newspaper racks, and stalls for storage mail.

O&StCV runs on all weekends and holidays from April through October. The car runs on all trips, and a retired Railway Mail Service employee is usually on hand to explain how RPO's functioned. The 1 p.m. departure from Osceola to Dresser features an on-the-fly pickup, which makes the O&StCV the best bet among museum lines for seeing mail snagged on the fly. (Info: 715-755-3570, www.trainride.org)

While exterior restoration lies ahead for O&StCV's car (and is expected soon, thanks to a grant through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Enhancement Act), it has been finished on Santa Fe RPO 74 at California's Campo Railroad Museum, an arm of the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum that operates on a segment of the old San Diego & Arizona Eastern.

Since 2002 this 60-foot, Pullman-built 1927 heavyweight shines in its

Santa Fe green (a dark olive, lighter than Pullman green) paint. With two doors (one with catcher arm) and six barred windows on each side, this car is a classic, lovingly restored. Every weekend visitors can board the car at Campo and examine the sorting counters, mail pouches, and pigeonhole boxes. Each March on the Postal Heritage Days weekend, 74 is taken outside to re-enact on-the-fly pickups under the direction of a Railway Mail Service veteran. (Info: 619-465-7776; www.psrm.org)

Another place to watch mailbags snagged on the fly is the Orange Empire Railway Museum in Perris, Calif., home to Santa Fe car 60, built by Pullman in 1924. A sister to the one at Campo, the 60 was Santa Fe's first all-steel RPO and operated on trains 7 and 8, the *Fast Mail and Express*. Exterior restoration (which involves major metal work plus painting) is in progress, with one side done. Meanwhile, the RPO can be visited on weekends year-round, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on some occasions boarded, the best way to appreciate its fully original interior. On-the-fly re-enactments are held annually. Plans call for erecting a permanent wooden mail crane, based on original Santa Fe plans from 1900. (Info: 951-943-3020, www.oerm.org)

At the North Carolina Transportation Museum in Southern Railway's historic Spencer Shops, car 49, an RPO built for Southern in 1922 by American Car & Foundry, is on exhibit. Although on-the-fly pick-ups are staged only on special occasions, notably the annual Rail Days in May (when children can mail a postcard on the RPO to receive a special cancellation), the car is routinely open for visiting. The museum is open Tuesday-Saturday year-round, and also Sunday-Monday April-October; hours vary. (Info: 877-628-6386, www.nctrans.org)

Inside the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, you can step aboard Great Northern lightweight baggage-mail car 42, a 1950 ACF car gleaming in GN's Pullman green and Omaha orange. The car, used on GN's premier transcontinental *Empire Builder* and *Western Star*, no longer operates, but it is brought to life in another way when docents (some of them retired RMS employees) explain to visitors the intricacies of RPO operations. For demonstration of catching and kicking-out of bags, a crane is bolted to the floor next to the car. The museum is open daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Info: 916-445-6645, www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org)

Another fine RPO display is at the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C., opened in 1993 as an arm of the Smithsonian Institution in the splendid 1914 City Post Office Building adjacent to Union Station. In the building's atrium is the "Mail by Rail" exhibit, which focuses on a re-creation of part of a Southern Railway RPO (in the shell of a former Grand Trunk Western car), with authentic interior furnishings taken from an actual car. The exhibit includes a mail crane and catcher arm. The museum is open daily except Christmas, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Info: 202-633-5555, www.postalmuseum.si.edu)

There are a few other static displays of RPO cars around the country, some with adjacent mail cranes. One example is by the Rock Island depot at Council Bluffs, Iowa, where a Union Pacific 85-footer is exhibited. A Burlington heavyweight is at Galesburg, Ill., while another Q RPO is inside the famous *Pioneer Zephyr* at Chicago's Museum of Science & Industry.

Sadly, among the hundreds of passenger cars preserved in railroad museums across North America, RPO's are a small minority, but happily, the few that survive help us to understand an aspect of passenger railroading that once was critically important to the industry, and to the country. ■

Robert S. McGonigal

North Carolina Transportation Museum's Southern RPO 49, behind E8 6900 and FP7 6133, will snag a mailbag on June 19, 1996, during the NRHS national convention. The cancellation (top) marked the 10th anniversary of the museum's establishment at the Historic Spencer Shops.

California State Railroad Museum

The late Ed Reid, a former RPO clerk who served as a docent at the California State Railroad Museum, demonstrates sorting mail aboard CSRM's Great Northern RPO 42 in the mid-1990's.

Racing into

Documenting the passing of an era on Great Northern's *Gopher* and *Badger*

It was an equitable and agreeable arrangement. My wife enjoyed the generous comforts of the parlor car and I rode ahead in the workaday Railway Post Office car. Both cars were integral to Great Northern's *Gopher* and *Badger* trains linking St. Paul and Minneapolis with Superior, Wis., and Duluth, Minn. (the "Twin Ports" at the west end of Lake Superior). A one-day excursion could be accomplished on the *Badger* from St. Paul, returning on the *Gopher*, or one could make an overnight trip, up on the *Gopher* and back on the *Badger* the next morning.

Sandy and I made several trips from 1966 into 1968 as the curtain was falling on the era of passenger trains operated by the nation's investor-owned railroads. The end of that era, for the most part, also marked the end of the Railway Mail Service including the Duluth & St. Paul RPO route handled by the GN. Known informally as the "Brook Park," it was one of my favorites. (Many RPO lines had nicknames; "Brook Park" came from the tiny community at the intersection of the line up from Coon Creek Junction and another GN line to Hinckley and beyond.)

The outbound *Badger* made connections at St. Paul or Minneapolis off a host of night trains and RPO routes from the Pacific Northwest, Omaha, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and elsewhere in a way that represented the country's intricate and efficient postal web. The *Badger* then distributed mail to on-line and nearby communities, as well as to the Twin Ports and other points beyond. In return, the southbound *Gopher* acted as a funnel for mail that was delivered to places en route, to the Twin Cities, and to a multitude of night trains radiating from Minneapolis and St. Paul.

If at all possible, I arranged my Duluth sojourns to match the work schedule of Ben F. Russell, a genial and thoroughly efficient foreman in charge who went up on the *Gopher* and back the next day on the *Badger*. It was against the rules for "unauthorized persons" to be in RPO cars, but by the late 1960's, Post Office Inspectors were scarce around the railroad, and Russell was perfectly amenable to my riding along. In fact, I think he was pleased that anybody was interested in the dying institution of which he was a part.

Work was heavy out of, and back into, the Twin Cities, so a "helper" was assigned from St. Paul to Cambridge, 52 miles out, and back to St. Paul. North of Cambridge, however, Russell alone handled all the work for 108 miles.

Russell was a master of organization and execution—loading and unloading pouches, packages, and sacks; processing fussy registered mail; sorting letters, newspapers, and magazines; postmarking "drops" (letter mail handed to him by customers at station stops); and filling out all necessary paperwork pertaining to the run.

North of Cambridge, Russell also was responsible for all

history

DULUTH & ST. PAUL
TR23
OCT 5
1968
R.P.O.

MAIL BY Rail

By Don L. Hofsommer • Photos by the author

With GN train 24 making 70 mph, clerk Chris Nygaard peers ahead just before making the catch at Duquette, Minn., in spring 1968.

nonstop mail exchanges—throwing out or kicking out a pouch while almost simultaneously using the car's catcher arm to snag a pouch from a trackside mail crane.

There were several nonstop exchanges in the thinly populated area served by these trains. Particularly challenging were exchanges at Duquette, Kerrick, and Bruno—three of them in 8 miles, with only 2 miles separating Duquette and Kerrick. On the southbound *Badger,* Russell had to make the exchange at Duquette, unlock and dump the Duquette pouch to see if it contained anything for Kerrick or Bruno, lock out the Kerrick pouch, get to the door to make the Kerrick exchange, repeat the process, and be ready a couple of minutes later for Bruno. The Post Office Department urged that these catches be made at not more than 45 mph, a suggestion locomotive engineers honored more in the breach than in practice—especially if running late. And the whole process was even more exciting in darkness or during a blizzard or in fog.

Russell moved like a dervish during all of it. I stayed out of his way but looked for means to record this frenetic activity on film. In time we hit on a system where he counted down to the exchange so that I might have hope in tripping the shutter correspondent with the catch. We got pretty good at it.

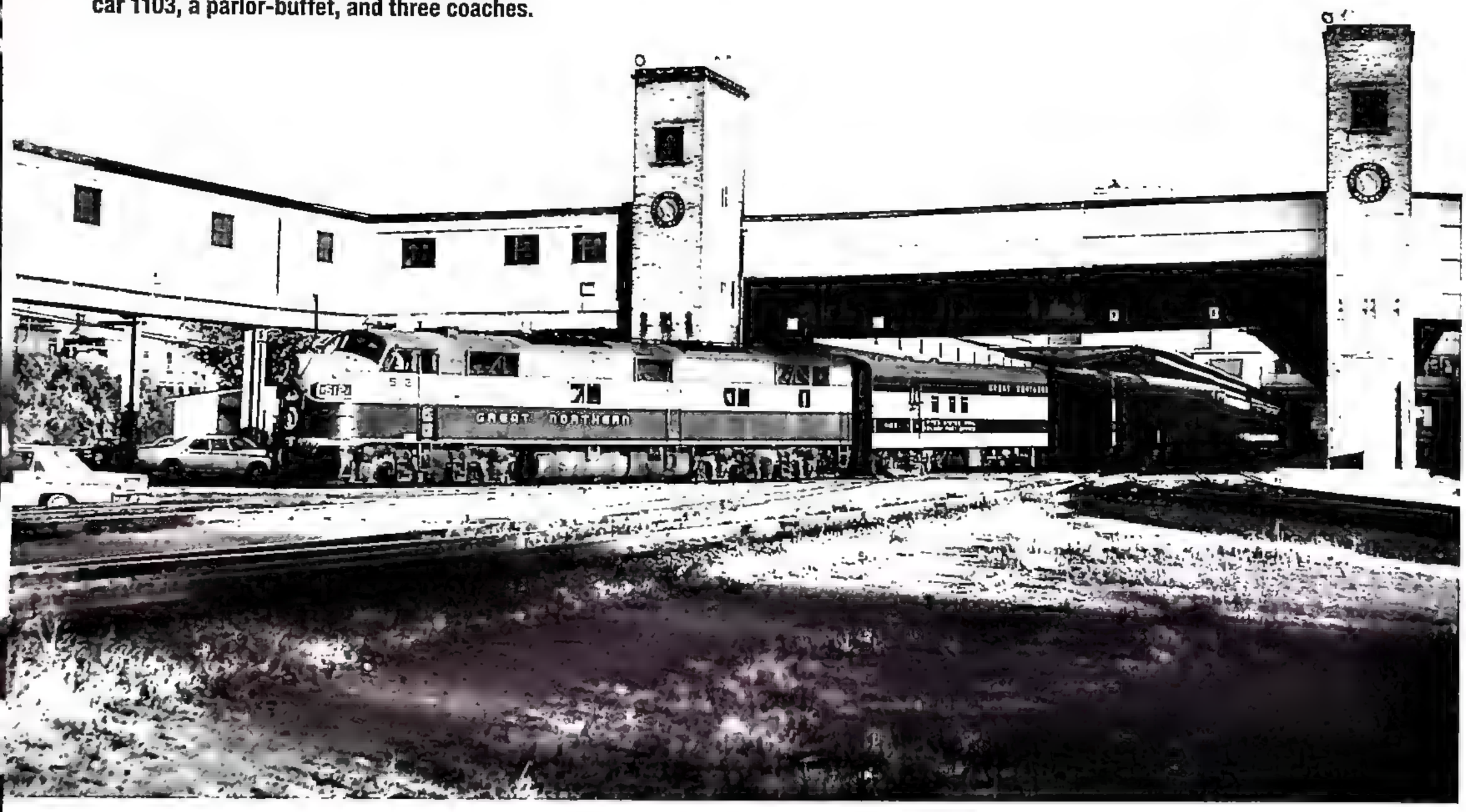
There was little opportunity for conversation and, in any event, Russell was all business. He took unspoken pride in his work and, not surprisingly, was respected by those who worked with him and by supervisors as well. Russell was typical of Railway Mail Service personnel who rightfully saw themselves as elites of the Post Office Department.

To "go stuck"—failing to work all mails presented between headout and destination terminals—was a source of acute embarrassment for Russell and all members of the RMS fraternity. Foremen and crews took great pride in building reputations for their speed and accuracy in sorting mail to appropriate destinations.

The Post Office Department took a deadly whack at the RMS in 1967, decimating the nationwide system and leaving only a few remnants. The Duluth & St. Paul RPO was one of the survivors, but it lived on borrowed time. With a greater sense of urgency I continued to memorialize that particular RPO line with a photographic record. This was accomplished by riding with Russell, as well as by innumerable highway trips to stations along the route of the Brook Park.

The end came for the Brook Park with final runs assigned the *Gopher* on October 4, 1968, and the next day for the *Badger.* Yet the line lives on in the storehouse of my mind where Ben F. Russell still postmarks my letters and dispatches them with his usual alacrity and pride.

The *Gopher* curves out of GN's Minneapolis station on its evening run to the Twin Ports in fall 1968. Behind E7 512 are RPO-baggage car 1103, a parlor-buffet, and three coaches.



Minnesota corridor

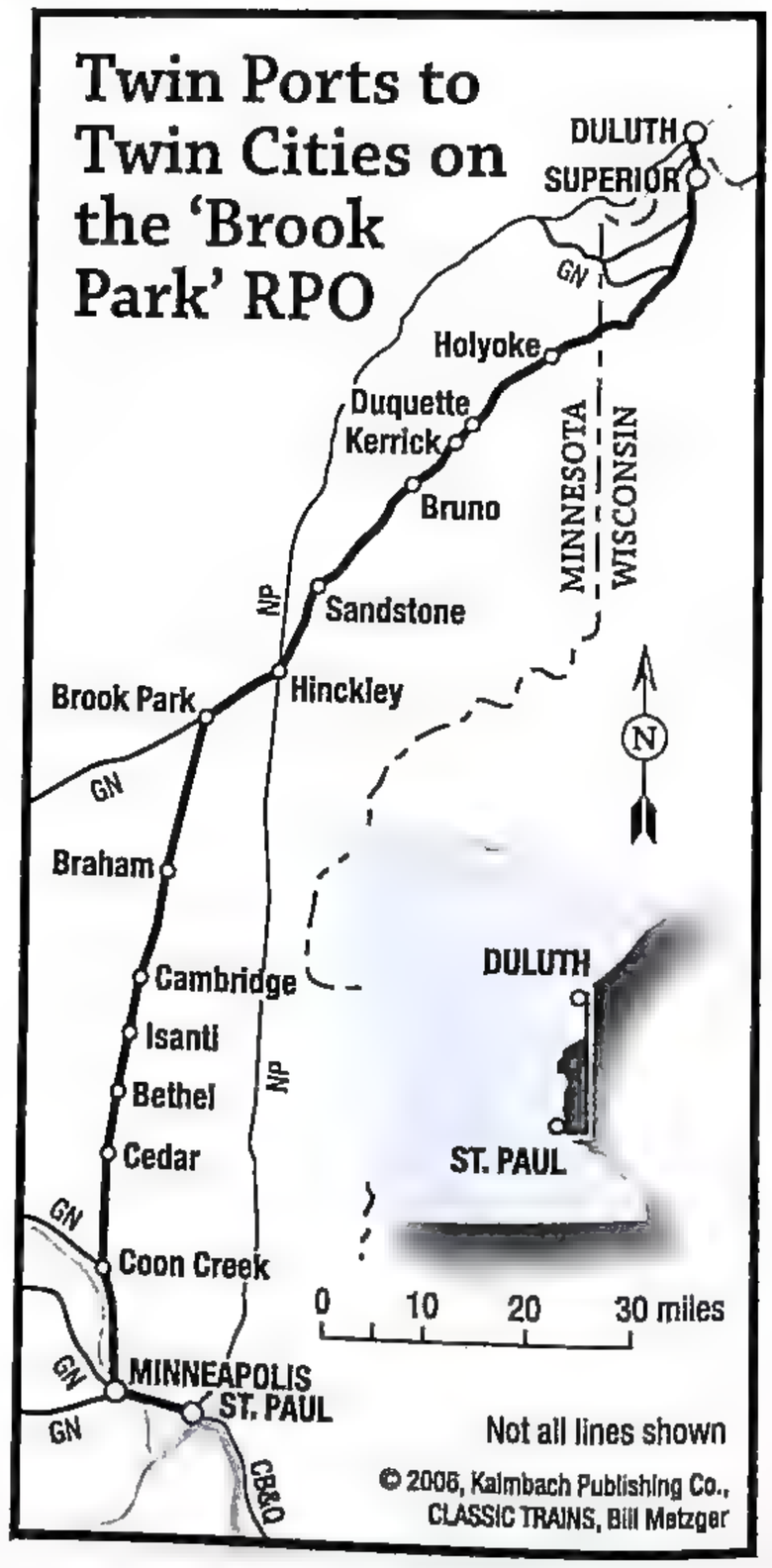
GN's *Badger* and *Gopher* were named for the state animals of Wisconsin and Minnesota, respectively. Until the early 1960's, Northern Pacific and Soo Line also ran Twin Cities-Twin Ports passenger trains; the three roads honored each others' tickets in a pool arrangement. As the corridor's top trains, the northbound *Badger* and southbound *Gopher* lasted, as BN trains, until Amtrak. The GN timetable below is from April 27, 1969.

ST. PAUL, MINNEAPOLIS, SUPERIOR AND DULUTH

TABLE 16

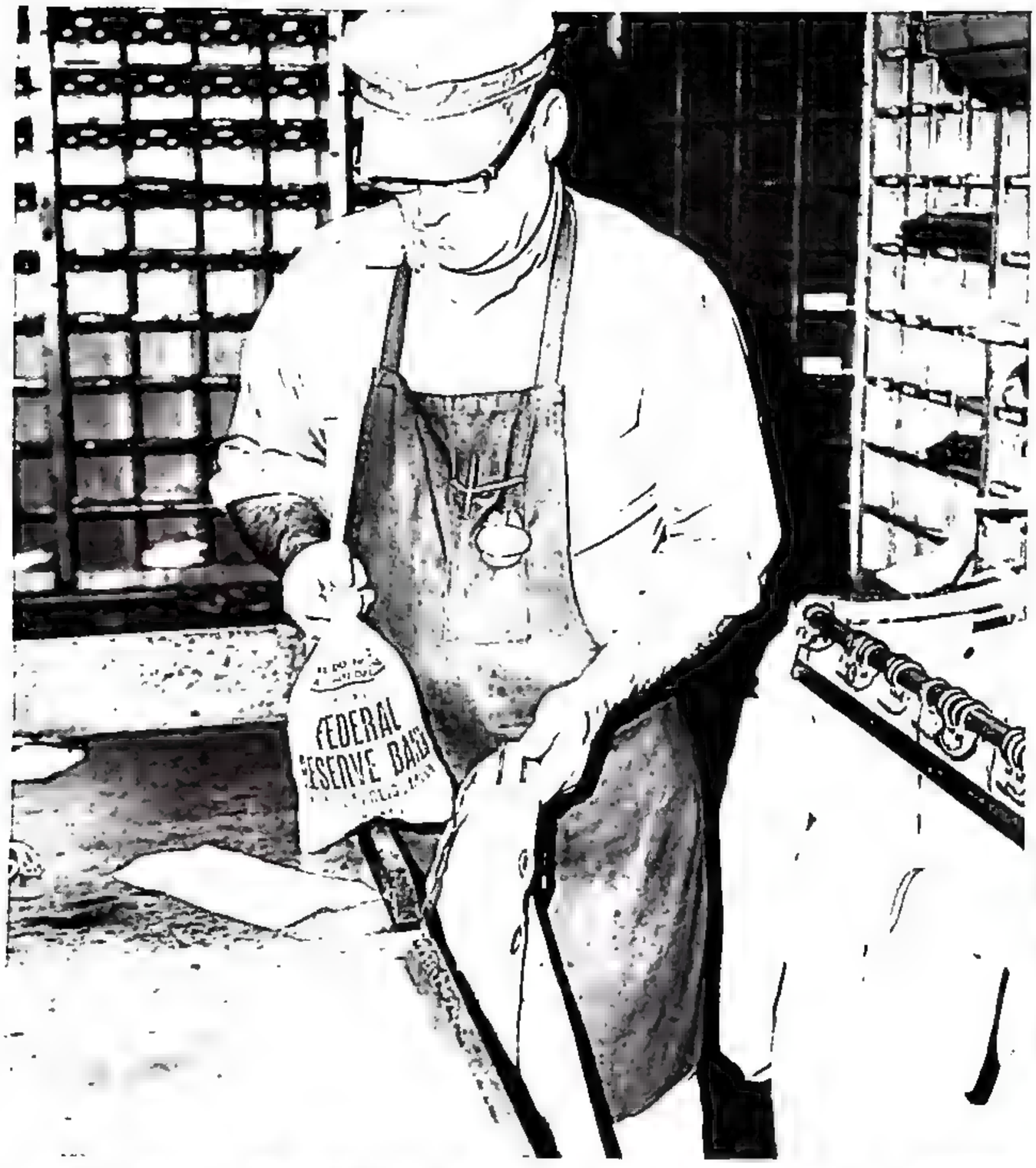
Central Standard Time

Read Down: Daily 20 Gopher	Daily 24 Badger	Miles		Daily 23 Badger	Daily 19 Gopher
PM	AM			AM	PM
5 30	8 10	0	Lv St. Paul 1, 2 (G.N. Sta.) Ar	11 00	8 30
5 52	8 30	11	Ar Minneapolis Lv	10 40	8 05
6 00	8 35	11	Lv Minneapolis 1, 2	10 35	8 00
— —	— —	23	" Coon Creek Jct	— —	— —
— —	— —	29	" Andover	— —	— —
— —	— —	35	" Cedar	— —	— —
— —	f 9 07	41	" Bethel	f 9 58	— —
— —	9 14	47	" Isanti	9 52	— —
6 43	9 23	52	" Cambridge	9 45	7 15
— —	— —	57	" Grandy	— —	— —
— —	f 9 37	60	" Stanchfield	f 9 29	— —
— —	9 43	63	" Braham	9 26	— —
— —	9 48	68	" Grasston	9 21	— —
— —	f 9 53	74	" Henriette	f 9 16	— —
— —	f 9 58	80	" Brook Park	f 9 11	— —
— —	10 07	88	" Hinckley	9 02	— —
7 30	10 17	97	" Sandstone	8 53	6 30
— —	10 26	103	" Askov	8 43	— —
— —	f10 36	111	" Bruno	f 8 35	— —
— —	f10 43	117	" Kerrick	f 8 29	— —
— —	— —	119	" Duquette	— —	— —
— —	— —	135	" Foxboro	— —	— —
8 35	11 30	156	Ar Superior (Union Station) Lv	7 45	5 25
8 50	11 45	160	Ar Duluth 19 (Union Sta.)	7 30	5 10
PM	AM			AM	PM



During several visits to Bethel, Minn., in 1968, Hofsommer photographed the various stages of nonstop mail exchanges. At left, mail messenger Phil Fox hangs a catcher pouch of outbound mail on the crane. Above, the northbound *Badger* bears down on the waiting pouch. At lower left, a trainman on No. 23 watches from a Dutch door as a clerk makes another successful catch.

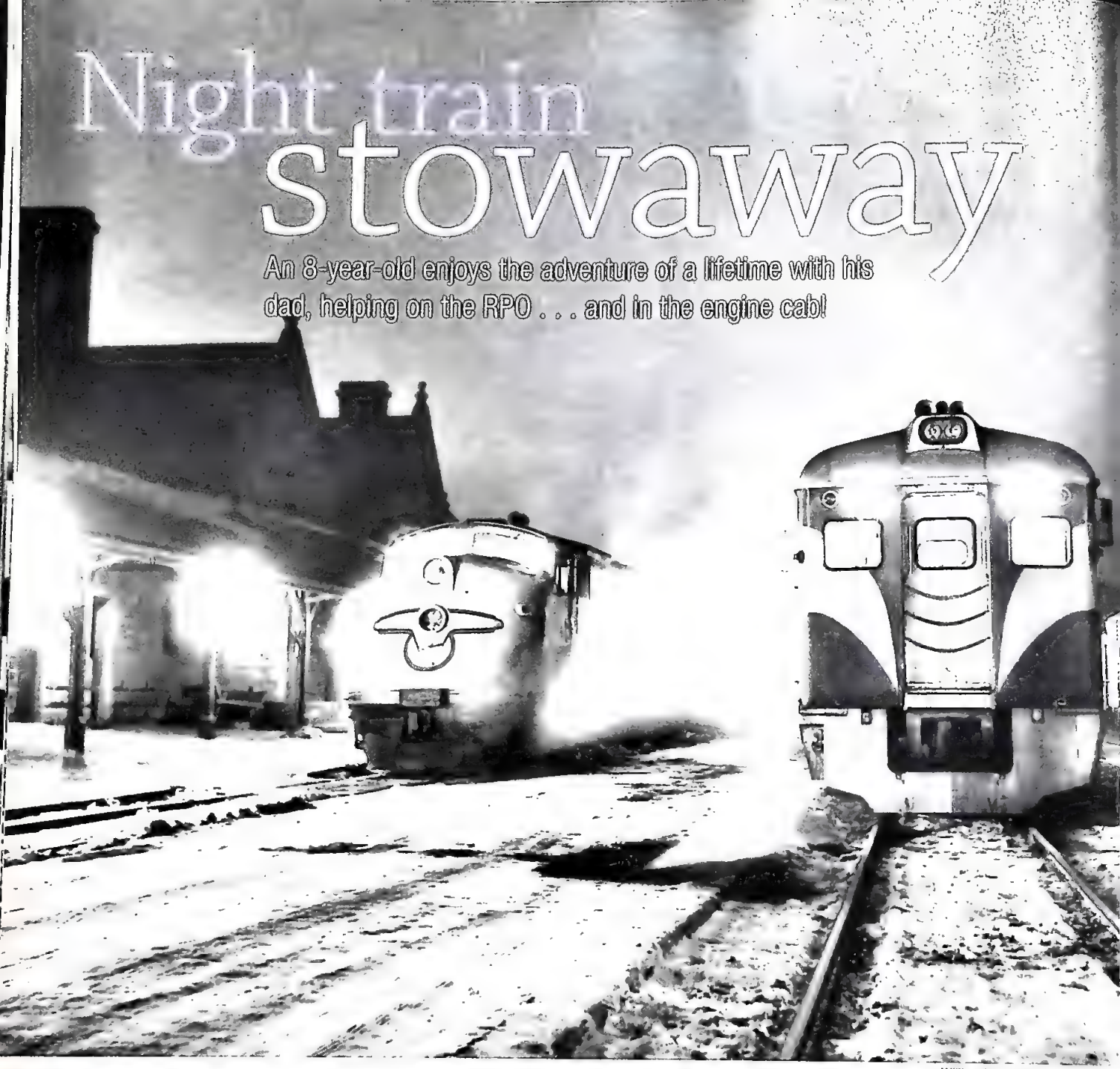
Many trackside observers liked to watch nonstop mail exchanges, but Hofsommer got a rare chance to see the process from the inside, thanks to Ben Russell, Foreman in Charge on the Duluth & St. Paul RPO. Russell is seen at work in a series of photos from a fall 1968 trip on GN train 23. Approaching an exchange point (right), he's got the pouch to be dropped off in his left hand, the catcher-arm handle in his right as he looks ahead for the mail crane. Having thrown off the one pouch (below), Russell has just caught the other with the catcher. Next (far right) he dumps the contents of the pouch he just caught onto the work table. Finally he's seen sorting mail put on at the Cambridge stop.


FEDERAL
RESERVE BANK

Ben Russell goes about his duties in four more photos from inside the 30-foot RPO apartment of the baggage-mail car the Great Northern provided for the "Brook Park" line. At upper left, he handles a bag of coins bound for the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis. In the lower left view, he post-marks a "drop" (a letter that entered the postal system at the RPO). At left, Russell sorts first-class mail in surroundings familiar to generations of railway mail clerks. Above, he buckles up a pouch that he'll throw off at the next exchange point. Such scenes and skills became part of history on October 4-5, 1968, when the Duluth & St. Paul RPO made its last runs.

Night train stowaway

An 8-year-old enjoys the adventure of a lifetime with his dad, helping on the RPO . . . and in the engine cab!



William D. Middleton

On New Year's Day 1959, three and a half years after the author rode the RPO with his dad, train 510 of C&NW's Omaha Road, the *Chicago Limited*, prepared to leave Duluth for a night run to Altoona, Wis., en route to Chicago. At right is the Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific's sole RDC, which would leave about the same time for Fort Frances, Ontario.

By David A. Thompson

One of the greatest adventures of my life began when I was 8 years old, and it started a lifelong love affair with trains. Like so many adventures, this one began inauspiciously, gathering momentum with the passage of time. It would become a tale to be told to my grandchildren someday, by a warm fireplace on a cold blustery day.

In summer 1955, my father, a clerk for the U.S. Railway Mail Service on the Duluth & Altoona (Wis.) RPO, inquired, "David, would you like to take a trip on the train with me?" I remember the excitement I felt in replying, "Yes, I'd love to go with you!" My mother, concern written on her face, cautioned my father of the risk he would be taking. "Stowaways on ships, planes, and trains are not treated well," she said. But my dad merely returned a conspiratorial grin, saying, "I guarantee, it won't be a problem."

The big day arrived, a Saturday. I laid out my work clothes with great care: a new pair of overalls, work shirt, red neckerchief, and blue-and-white striped cap. They made me look like a real railroadman. I packed my own lunch into a metal lunch pail, preparing peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches and filling a jar with homemade grape pudding for dessert. I wrapped up some cookies in wax paper for a midnight snack, and I packed a Thermos filled with milk, although I secretly hoped my dad would share some of his coffee with me—a real man's drink. With care, I also packed a small bag containing my Dick Tracy Cap Pistol and hol-

MAIL BY Rail

ster set. I planned on strapping on my gun when Dad buckled on his own, very real holster and pistol all clerks wore to protect the mail. If imitation is the highest compliment one can give a person, I was doing just that to my father that day. As we left home that night, I began to paste pictures in the scrapbook of my mind, to later retrieve and review, long after Dad had passed from my life.

We drove into the parking lot at the Omaha Road depot in Duluth, Minn., around 6 p.m. on an unusually muggy July evening, about two hours before train departure time. (The Omaha Road was part of the Chicago & North Western system. Its Duluth depot was shared with the Duluth, Winnipeg & Pacific, part of the Canadian National system, and the two roads exchanged a lot of international mail at Duluth.) My heart raced as I saw the yellow-and-green cars of train No. 510, the *Chicago Limited*, sitting on a track near the station. A switchman carefully guided the locomotive backward to the cars, and with a muffled bang, it coupled to the train.

The consist, behind a single diesel (which I would later learn to call an "E unit"), was about 10 cars: a dark green baggage car with a 30-foot Railway Post Office section in front, followed by another baggage car, a Railway Express car, and several yellow-and-green passenger cars (according to an *Official Guide* of the period, two Pullman sleepers, a cafe-lounge, and several coaches). As I walked toward the mail car with my father, the sights and sounds were wonderful to experience. Close-up, the engine and cars seemed huge to a young boy.

I tried to climb the ladder to the mail-car door, ducking under the mail catcher arm. I slipped and almost fell trying to get up into the car, but Dad caught me and, with a good-natured laugh, boosted me in.

In short order, after climbing into the RPO compartment, Dad strapped on his gun, and I followed suit. He began hooking empty mail pouches to the labeled pouch racks, which were attached to the car's side walls. He turned his attention to placing new labels on the letter case, which rose above the desk in the rear of the compartment. High above that letter case, my youthful eyes caught the picture of a semi-clad, generously endowed pin-up girl. It reminded me that I was definitely in a "man's world," where such art forms were appreciated. Odors of tobacco, and evidence of ashtrays and spittoons, testified that I was in what I would learn could be called Marlboro and Copenhagen country, heady stuff for an 8-year-old! Fast-moving trains, guns, pictures of pin-up girls, and smells of tobacco and diesel fumes intoxicated me with a feeling of high adventure. I thought to myself, these guys really know how to live!

Soon, iron-wheeled carts arrived at the door, heaped with mail pouches and bags. I pitched in with my dad, helping him load the car with Chicago-bound mail. A brakeman walked by

> ***Suddenly it dawned on me that everyone knew a stowaway was on board. They all had entered into a conspiracy.***

and shouted to Dad with a grin on his face, "I see you have a little helper tonight to keep you awake." I glanced at the smile on my father's face and the grins on the faces of the "depot men," and suddenly it dawned on me that everyone knew a stowaway was on board. They all had entered into a conspiracy to introduce "the kid" to life on the rails.

Soon my father emptied the bags of mail on the letter-sorting tables. As Dad began to sort the mail, the engineer gave two short blasts on the horn, acknowledging the conductor's "highball" signal to get under way. A deep-throated rumbling noise emitted from up ahead, and the mail-car floor began to sway and rock as the engine pulled the train up into the station to load the passengers. A short while later, with all aboard, we pulled out. The train rolled through the yards, and I listened to the rhythmic noise of rails and wheels, steel meeting steel, as we picked up speed. Soon the train was rumbling over the bridge spanning the harbor, heading into Superior, Wis., my hometown.

I stood in the mail-car door looking at the city lights reflected in the shimmering water. I had seen this sight so many times before, but from a landlubber's perspective. Somehow this night, as we crossed that bridge, the city looked so different when seen from the train . . . bigger and brighter than ever before. As we rumbled into Superior, through street crossings with flashing red lights, I stood in the open door and waved at strangers sitting in cars waiting for the train to clear. I felt like a celebrity on parade! The people who saw me waved and grinned.

Shortly after we left the city, the train began to pick up speed. Then, from under the letter case desk on the wall separating the car's RPO and baggage sections, came a series of knocks, followed by a pause and some more knocks. It was the conductor, communicating to my dad through a prearranged code that he wished to enter the RPO compartment through the small, floor-level door beneath the desk. Dad bent down, unlatched the door, and in crawled the conductor. After some joking about my stowaway status, he said, "The engineer wants to see the kid. He needs his help up front in the engine cab." My dad grinned and said, "OK, but first I've something to do." With that, he walked swiftly to the light switch by one of the doors. As the train passed our home, which was located near the tracks, he flicked the lights off and on twice. From a distance, I saw our front porch light flash back twice, as my mother and dad exchanged their usual "good-bye, good night, and I love you" signal with the winking of the lights.

With a grin and a twinkle in his eyes, Dad picked up a stool and some empty mail bags. Following the conductor, he shepherded me toward the engine. We walked through the hot, noisy engine room to get to the cab up front. The fireman greeted me with, "Nice to meet ya, kid." He was a tall, thin man, dressed in overalls and cap. He seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the stowaway conspiracy. The engineer was a portly, jovial-looking man. He greeted me, while clenching a cigar in his teeth, "I've got a job for you, kid."

With a knowing smile, my dad set the stool in the right center of the cab, near the engineer. He piled the empty mail bags on the stool for me to sit on, so I could see through the windshield. Once I was seated, the conductor and my dad left, promising to return near the end of the run. The engineer turned to me and said with a grin, "Your job is to blow the horn at every road crossing tonight. Do you think you can do it? I'll show you how, and then you watch for my signal when to do it, OK?" I don't remember saying anything to him—I was speechless! I could only nod my head in assent, feeling like I had just died and gone to heaven.

The locomotive's revolving headlight washed against the Wisconsin night sky, revealing upcoming crossings and an occasional deer jumping across the track. I learned to blow the horn quite well that night. With every blast, I

William D. Middleton

Substitute a warm July evening in 1955 for the cold and snow of January 1, 1959, and you can imagine the setting at the Duluth station that began the author's night-train adventure.

warned the world that the night train was coming fast. As we roared through the small towns, I pulled on the lanyard hard and long. The smell of the diesel fumes and cigar smoke filled my nostrils. Still now, a half century later, with even one whiff of those odors, I'm back in that engine cab, perched high on a stool, feeling the power and speed of the train, warning by the horn for all who will hear, "Bystanders beware, the night train is coming through."

As we neared Spooner, midway down the line, the fireman turned to the engineer and said, "I love this town—it's my favorite on this line." The engineer joked back, "The only reason you like this place is you get paid extra money to throw the switch in and out of the passenger station. If all we did was go in and out of here, you'd be a rich man!" Soon the train rolled to a stop, and the fireman dismounted and threw the switch. (The brakeman would handle the switch duty when we pulled out; in reality, I'd learn as an adult that crewmen routinely did this sort of thing as favors to each other, and extra pay was seldom formally requested.) As the train pulled into the depot, the fireman turned to me with a conspiratorial grin, and said, in reference to railroad police, "Duck down, kid, we don't want anyone to see you tonight, especially those humorless railroad dicks. If they catch you here, we'll all catch hell."

After midnight, as we neared the division point of Altoona, Wis., just east of Eau Claire, my father returned for me. He thanked the engineer and fireman for keeping an eye on me. The engineer said to my dad as he grinned back at me, "The boy will make a great engineer someday, you'll see." With those wonderful words of praise ringing in my ears and warming my heart, I made my way back to the mail car with Dad.

Once we were stopped in Altoona (where the cars were attached to train 406, the crack Minneapolis-Milwaukee-Chicago *North Western Limited*), I helped my father unload the mailbags from the RPO for transfer to points east. Once we had finished that task, Dad shut off the lights in the car and we climbed down and went to get something to eat.

We made our way across the tracks to a little "greasy spoon," frequented by train crews and other railroaders. Cigarette smoke hung in a heavy haze. Crewmen gulped down large cups of black coffee and ate rolls as they shot the breeze. Dad and I had the "Switchman's Special," a hot beef sandwich with roast beef heaped on bread and a mountain of mashed potatoes piled to the side, all swimming in brown gravy. This rib-sticking railroader's meal tasted great.

The ride back to Duluth on train No. 511, the *Duluth-Superior Limited*, due out of Altoona a bit after 2 a.m., was just as exciting as the one coming down. I was put to work moving mailbags and parcels for the clerks to sort as the train headed north. The

CLASSIC TRAINS collection

Express and mail is worked at a station on the Chicago & North Western with a head-end car similar to the one that served the Duluth & Altoona RPO on subsidiary Omaha Road.

crew laughed and joked about the stowaway trick as we sped along. I enjoyed the lunch I'd prepared the night before—at 3 o'clock in the morning, peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches tasted pretty good. And true to my hopes, in the midst of it all, my dad shared his coffee with me—I drank no milk at all.

I listened to the stories told by the men of the Railway Mail Service: crashing train wrecks, derailments, and robbery attempts. They told stories of mailbags thrown out on the fly missing their mark and being torn up under the wheels. They laughed as they recalled a postmaster chasing after the train, trying to capture parts of letters turned to confetti as the train flew through his town.

My dad told a story of throwing a mail pouch on the fly, only to hit a man standing by the track. Dad recalled, "This guy's eyes got as big as sewer lids when he, in the last instant, saw a bag full of mail coming at him at 50 mph. The next thing I saw, after he caught the pouch full in the chest, was the heels of his shoes as he tumbled over and over down the platform embracing the morning mail." I knew some of these tales were only half-true, but a good story was always prized on the railroad, a place for embellishment to prevail.

Even now, one whiff of diesel fumes and cigar smoke puts me back in that engine cab, warning by the horn that the night train is coming through.

As the sun rose that Sunday morning, we seemed to be rocking and rolling as never before. The mail clerks said "the mad engineer" was at the controls, "for you see, the engineer is a very religious man and wants to get to church on time. Every Sunday he is on, he exceeds the speed limit to buy 20 minutes of time." They laughed because they'd heard the conductor say at the cafe the night before, "I'm going to fix this engineer's bad habit with time. This is no way to run a railroad, ignoring schedules and times. I've rigged it so he'll get a red signal if he is early, so he can cool his heels and learn to arrive on time."

True to form, we arrived with time to spare, and the train was stopped by a red signal. In time, the signal changed to green, and the train arrived at the Duluth station "right on time." The clerks grinned at the conductor from the mail-car door as the engineer jumped from the engine and ran for his car, and the clerks commented that they hoped for a smoother Sunday morning ride from now on.

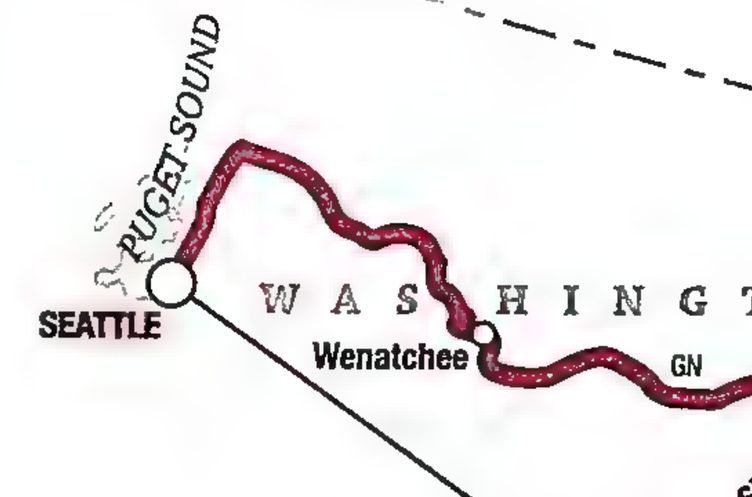
Since those wonderful days of youth, I have sailed the oceans of the world and set foot upon most of its continents. Yet it is the first story that remains the best—of a boy, with his dad, on a train, enjoying the adventure of his life. ■

Boston-Seattle

From *Fast Mail* to *Fast Mail*,
all the way across the continent

By David A. Thompson

F's on No. 27 beside depot switcher, July 1948.
Wade J. Stevenson



Unloading the *Empire Builder*'s RPO, 1958.
Philip R. Hastings

Six decades ago, when first-class postage was a mere 3 cents, some 93 percent of all non-local mail moved by rail. The Post Office Department published schemes and schedules so clerks would know the most efficient routing for mail between two points. Using these documents, it's possible to trace the likely path of a letter from city to city or even coast to coast.

Let's say a mother in Boston is sending a letter to her son, John, a sailor at Naval Base Seattle in February 1947.

On Monday afternoon at 4 p.m. she drops off the letter at Boston's main post office in the financial district. It is here, at its entrance to the postal system, that the letter is postmarked. (As a rule, only letters mailed directly to a Railway Post Office car, or to a station-platform mailbox serviced by an RPO, receive an RPO postmark.)

Clerks closing out the mail at 4:30 recognize it as a westbound letter. One of them determines the best connection, and chooses the Boston & Albany RPO, which runs in train 35 of the Boston & Albany Railroad, the New York Central's New England subsidiary. (This RPO line is one of the very few whose name matches that of the railroad over which it operates; there also was a Louisville & Nashville RPO.)

B&A 35, named the *Fast Mail* in this era, is scheduled to leave South Station, about three-quarters of a mile from the main post office, at 7:50 p.m., arriving in Albany at 1:25 a.m. on Tuesday, to connect with the New York & Chicago RPO on NYC train 35, also called the *Fast Mail*. In addition to mail and express traffic, B&A 35 and NYC 35 carry coaches and sleepers for Chicago and other points.

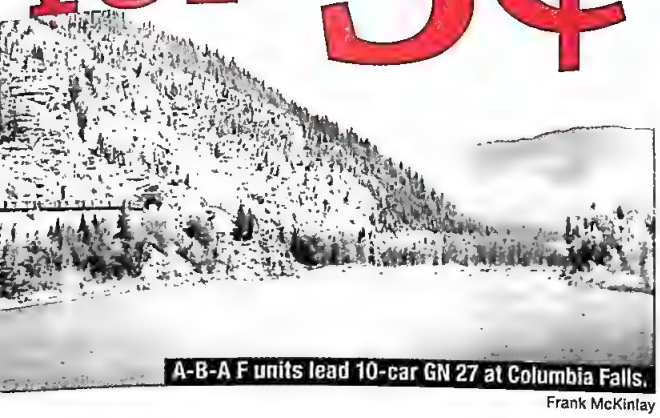
The Boston post office puts the letter in a "working mixed states pouch," which the Boston & Albany RPO crew must work before the end of their run, to connect with the New York & Chicago RPO. As the 60-foot mail car travels the 200 miles to Albany, a clerk puts the letter in a Washington State pouch for NYC 35. This train is due out of Albany at 1:44, allowing just 19 minutes to switch cars and transfer mail from B&A 35.

The crew of the New York & Chicago RPO (nicknamed "The Chic" or "The Big Line") is split into three divisions. The Eastern Division crew works from New York to Syracuse; the Middle Division crew, Syracuse-Cleveland; and the Western Division crew, Cleveland-Chicago. As each RPO crew nears the division-change point, clerks close out all letter cases, lock and store pouches, and hang new empty pouches for the next crew. The new crew climbs aboard

and puts in their own case headers on the letter cases and puts labels on the empty pouches and on overhead boxes.

Operating over the heaviest mail corridor in the country (and the first on which a "Fast Mail" service was established, in 1875), NYC 35 carries three 60-foot RPO cars, with a crew in excess of 25 clerks. "The Chic" does not work Washington State mail, so the pouch containing John's letter is stored in the rear of one of the cars. NYC 35 is due into Chicago at 5 p.m. Tuesday, in time to connect with Milwaukee Road train 57, still known at least informally as

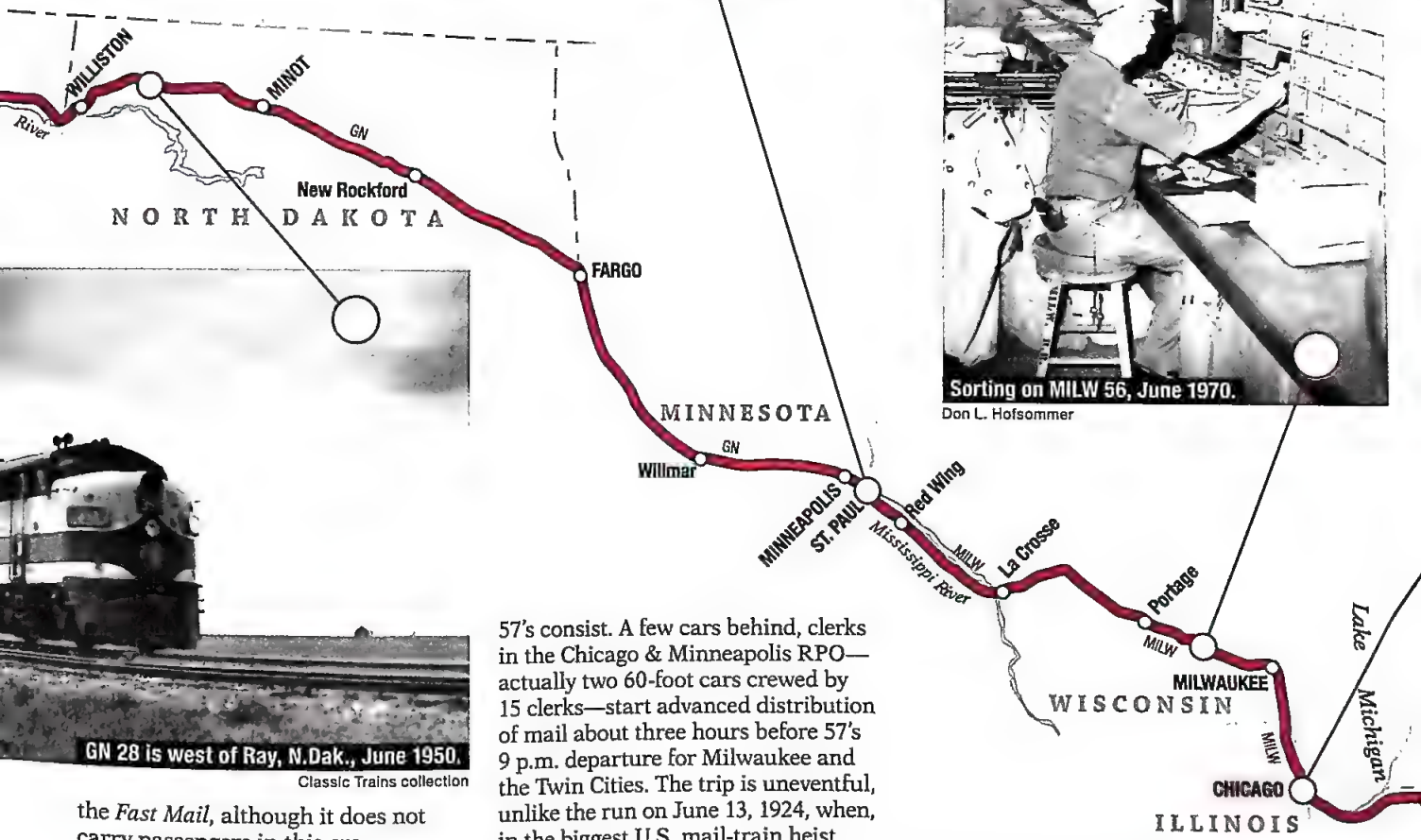
for 3¢



A-B-A F units lead 10-car GN 27 at Columbia Falls.
Frank McKinlay

Sorting on MILW 56, June 1970.
Don L. Hofsommer

GN 28 is west of Ray, N.Dak., June 1950.
Classic Trains collection



the *Fast Mail*, although it does not carry passengers in this era.

Since the NYC operates into La Salle Street Station while the Milwaukee uses Union Station, the Post Office Department makes frequent truck movements over the half-mile between Transfer Offices at each station. The transfer clerks and railroad-employee mail handlers they supervise sort pouches and sacks according to outbound route dispatches.

Having been transferred to Union Station, the pouch with John's letter is loaded into a storage mail car in No. 57's consist. A few cars behind, clerks in the Chicago & Minneapolis RPO—actually two 60-foot cars crewed by 15 clerks—start advanced distribution of mail about three hours before 57's 9 p.m. departure for Milwaukee and the Twin Cities. The trip is uneventful, unlike the run on June 13, 1924, when, in the biggest U.S. mail-train heist ever, bandits stopped No. 57 at Rondout, Ill., and robbed it of more than $2 million. The money was later recovered and the gangsters jailed.

The "Chic & Min" rolls into St. Paul Union Depot at 5:40 a.m. Wednesday. John's letter, in its Washington pouch, is transferred to the St. Paul & Williston RPO, already doing advanced distribution in the yard.

This RPO, on Great Northern Railway train 27—yet another bearer of the *Fast Mail* name—utilizes a 60-foot RPO car with nine clerks split into two divisions. The Eastern Division crew works to Fargo; Western Division men, from there to Williston, N.Dak. Train 27 leaves St. Paul at 8:45 a.m. and gets to Fargo at 2:35 p.m.; primarily a mail and express train, GN 27 also carries a coach for passengers and crew. The Washington mail is not worked on the Eastern Division, although mail for Alberta, British Columbia, and Montana is. On the Western Division, the Washington pouch is taken from stor-

GN 27 leaves St. Paul with 16 mail/express cars, 1 coach.

Carl J. Bachmann

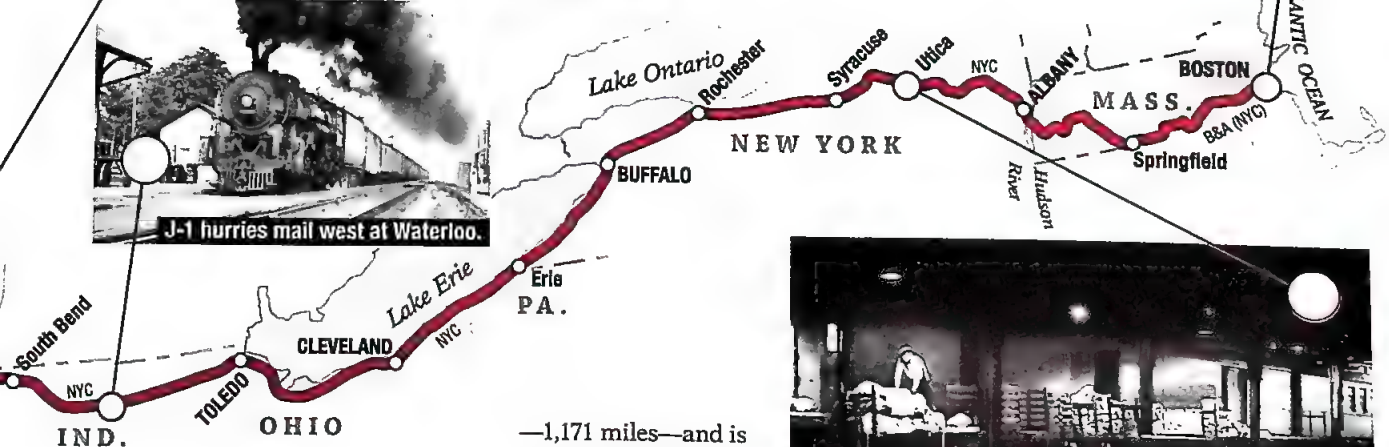
B&A 27, with RPO, steams out of South Station, August '46.

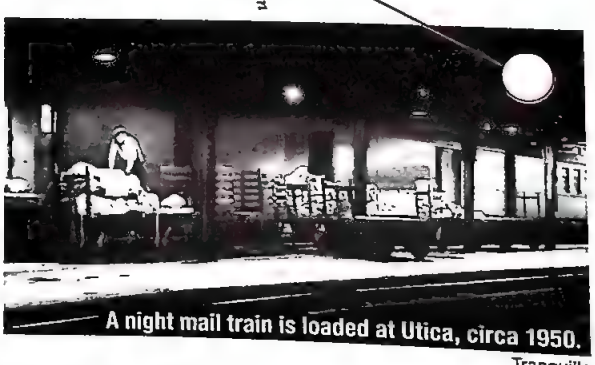
Ralph E. Hallock

Niagara brings NYC 35 into Chicago, June 1949.

Above, Bob Lorenz; below, Ralph E. Hallock

J-1 hurries mail west at Waterloo.





A night mail train is loaded at Utica, circa 1950.

Tranquille

N.Y. C.P.O. TR 35 SEP 16 1945 R.P.O.

MAIL BY Rail

age and sorted for the first time for specific destinations in the Evergreen State. John's letter is sorted, bundled, and pouched for Seattle and marked for continuation on the Williston & Seattle RPO on the same train.

The Williston & Seattle RPO ("The "Big G," "Williston," or "Highline"), is the longest route in the U.S. in terms of distance between end-points —1,171 miles—and is made up of three divisions. The Eastern Division crew works to Shelby, Mont.; the Middle Division crew, Shelby-Spokane, Wash.; and the Western Division crew, Spokane-Seattle.

GN 27 leaves Williston at 9:05 p.m. Wednesday, and John's letter is stored in a Seattle pouch until Spokane, where the clerks begin to sort Seattle city mail. John's letter is placed in a pouch for "Naval Base Seattle," the base being large enough to rate its own pouch. GN 27 arrives at Seattle's King Street Station at 5 a.m. Friday.

The post office then delivers John's letter, mailed in Boston late Monday afternoon, by truck to the base mail room, where Navy postal clerks route it to John's unit for delivery. ■

Big Emmas over the Red River

Stalking L&N 2-8-4's on a huge, remote bridge was not easy . . . but was worth the effort

By Ed Theisinger • Photos by the author

In 1952, I was on an extended, 18-day trip from northern New Jersey with the late Bob Collins in search of steam. We'd begun in the early hours of Thursday, May 15, accompanied by Preston Johnson from Boston and fellow New Yorker George Hamcke, in Collins' auto. Friend Bob Malinoski, already on vacation in his own vehicle, came down from Pennsylvania's Horseshoe Curve near Altoona to join us at our first stop, Cumberland, Md., for some photography on the Baltimore & Ohio and Western Maryland. While in the Cumberland Narrows, we'd run into Bill Price, a local railfan who had many photos published in TRAINS magazine, and we were with him when he saw what he said was the first EM-1 class 2-8-8-4 to work west of Cumberland.

We spent parts of three days on the WM down toward Elkins, W.Va., a visit that included rides on two WM steam passenger trains and photographing a coal train with seven 2-8-0's interspersed as power ["Storming Blackwater Canyon," pages 62-64, Spring 2002 CLASSIC TRAINS]. Malinoski left us at Elkins on Saturday the 17th to return home so he could photograph more steam on the Reading Company before his vacation ended. The four of us then headed west, shooting steam on the Cherry River Boom & Lumber and Chesapeake & Ohio before tying up Sunday night near Kenova, W.Va. Plagued by dark and rainy weather, we reversed our trip plans and decided to go farther west, and then south, instead of vice versa. We dropped off Preston Johnson at Ironton, Ohio, on Monday the 19th to begin his trip back home on Norfolk & Western's eastbound *Powhatan Arrow*; the three of us then drove 455 miles straight through to Springfield, Ill.

After two days of mostly cloudy weather that included rides behind a Chicago & Illinois Midland 4-4-0 and on an Illinois Terminal interurban, we headed southeast, dropping off George Hamcke at Mattoon, Ill., on Wednesday so he could take the New York Central home. After memorable experiences on Thursday in southern Indiana on the Algers, Winslow & Western and Ferdinand railroads, Bob and I rejoiced as the sky cleared up as we headed into Kentucky, tying up for overnight at Middletown, just east of Louisville.

Thus did Friday, May 23, the ninth day of our odyssey, find Bob and me on the Louisville & Nashville at Winchester, in eastern Kentucky, stalking among other targets the railroad's M-1 class 2-8-4's, nicknamed "Big Emmas." Wayne Brumbaugh, a well-known New Haven dispatcher and prominent Boston-area rail photographer, had told Bob about discovering an impressive bridge on the L&N somewhere in the 26 miles between Winchester and Irvine, on the "EK" (Eastern Kentucky) Division, which would make for a spectacular photo—if we could get to it.

Accordingly, after shooting L&N's streamlined 4-6-2, No. 295, on an EK local waiting to depart Winchester, we headed south on Route 89 until we spotted the bridge off to the left in the rolling hills. A few yards beyond, we came to the L&N track, in a deep cut. The big bridge was so far away that we decided to drive farther to see if the road came any closer to it. Alas, after a few more miles, the road failed to head anywhere except south, and we completely lost sight of the bridge. It appeared that the spot where we'd crossed over the track would be the best place from where we could start, on foot, and still know where we were going.

We parked the car and looked for a place to descend to the track. The easiest-looking way was a path through the woods and underbrush, past an outhouse, to the top of a stone shoring wall, from which we could jump down to the roadbed about five feet below. This accomplished, we began walking the ties, keeping our ears cocked for 295 on the local. With our backs to the oncoming train, our imaginations ran wild, naturally, and we "heard" the train several times even though it was nowhere near us yet.

The track curved to the left, and soon, straightening to a tangent again, it emerged into a more open area, which we immediately took advantage of and got off the roadbed. Plowing through a dense field of goldenrod (Kentucky's state flower), we were grateful that neither of us suffered from hay fever. At the end of the open area, we decided to play it safe and wait for 295, with the local to pass. This was a good decision, as it came steaming along a minute later!

We pushed on toward the big bridge. The sun was beating down unmercifu

L&N Big Emma 1976 sails over Kentucky's Red River in May 1952. Worth the wait, this was *the* photo of our 18-day, 4,300-mile trip.

Before the northbound coal train crossed the big bridge (above, with M-1 pusher 1954), we had a practice shot with the northbound local passenger train (left), behind 4-6-2 240. Before that, we quit walking the track just in time to clear 295 and the southbound local.

as we trudged along the rock ballast and unevenly spaced ties. The equipment I carried added to my woes. Collins had merely his two cameras, in their cases, over his shoulder, but I had insisted on bringing my metal tripod, exposure meter, notebook, and lens hoods as well as two cameras, one of which had no case, forcing me to carry it in my hand. The day now was not as clear as it had been earlier—a bank of half clouds and half haze ringed the horizon, leaving only a circle of blue directly overhead.

After a long curve to the right, we finally arrived at the edge of the bridge. From where we stood, the spot offered nothing in the way of a good photo angle. On the left, the ground dropped abruptly from the roadbed to the Red River valley floor. On the right, the ground itself was more promising, but a group of trees seemed to block any view of the bridge. In addition, on the right were obstacles including a barbed-wire fence, immediately beyond which was an overflowing livestock-watering trough, fed by a spring. This created a sea of mud for yards around.

As we were pondering what to do, the northbound local passenger train, No. 4, counterpart to 295's train 3, coasted

Hot and tired or not, there's always time for another shot. We missed the lead engine, but got M-1 1951 pushing loads at Hargett, Ky.

northbound across the bridge with five cars behind 4-6-2 No. 240, which we had to shoot almost head-on.

We wondered when we could expect freights, so Bob decided to walk across the bridge and see if an employee was stationed at the installations visible on the south side. He returned to report there was not a person in sight.

Our attention now was concentrated on the land containing the obstacles seemingly preventing good photos; we thought that there *must* be a place from which to take a good bridge shot. We inspected the water trough and mud and noticed that someone had placed a few small, flat stones in the mud leading away from the trough to dry land. The trough was about the size of a bathtub, made of cement with squared-off sides and top, which could easily support one foot. We both now realized that with some gymnastics and luck, we could reach dry land.

I held down the top strand of barbed wire, which was about waist-high, and helped Bob over as he placed one foot, then the other, on the top of the water trough. Poised, he made a series of leaps for the stones, landing on alternate legs in rapid succession. One last leap and he made it. He walked over a bit, surveyed the area, and announced unemotionally, "A picture can be taken here."

After I repeated the gymnastics, I reached the spot and saw we couldn't find a more perfect view of the bridge. I set up my black-and-white camera on the tripod, framing the entire bridge in the viewfinder. All I would have to do was press the cable release at the moment I wanted a picture, leaving me free to handle my other camera, loaded with ASA 10 Kodachrome. Bob had developed the knack of handling both his cameras at once, but I hadn't.

We retired to the welcome shade of a tree to await a train, hoping one would come soon. Suddenly, several cows appeared over a rise about 100 feet behind us. My first concern was for my camera on the tripod. The cows, grazing on the grass as they neared us, were unmistakably heading for the water trough, and we were situated directly between them and it. Then more cows showed up.

It became apparent that although the cows were well aware of us, they weren't going to disturb us. Our chief concern now became the possibility of a cow or cows fouling the chances of getting a picture as a train came. The first cow or two grazed around us on the way to the water trough.

By this time, we noticed that the southbound semaphore on the far side of the bridge had dropped to horizontal, indicating the approach of a northbound freight. We were in luck! Shortly, we saw smoke rising from among the mountains in the distance. We moved out into the blazing sun and took up positions.

In a few minutes we could make out the sound of exhaust. Finally, the lead engine came into sight and rounded the sweeping curve to the bridge. Hauling a long string of loaded coal hoppers, Big Emma No. 1976 stormed across, drowning out the clicks of our four camera shutters. Pushing at the rear, smoking it up good, was another 2-8-4, No. 1954. We were well satisfied with what we'd seen, and the sun and the cows had cooperated. For me, the shot of 1976 on the bridge would be *the* picture of our long trip.

Despite the magnificent setting, we were hot, tired, and hungry and so ruled out waiting for another freight. Arriving back at the car with no trouble, we found it too hot to even touch—we burned our fingers opening the windows to air it out. Soon, though, we were on our way, letting the rushing air cool us. After a stop at the first store for some ice cream and something cool to drink, we headed on south toward Ravenna.

Just as we got to the L&N overpass in Irvine, however, another northbound coal train was rushing through. We made a U-turn and dashed back to a spot near Hargett, racing the train. We got out of the car just in time to see the lead engine upon us, so we had to pass up that shot, but we did get a going-away view, a better sun angle anyway, of 2-8-4 1951 pushing on the rear. Collins noted that the train had 138 cars, and the time was 2:35 p.m.

He sensed that a southbound might follow this northbound, so we parked the car and found an open spot up the tracks a short distance. Sure enough, about 3:15, 2-8-4 1950 drifted by with about 45 empties southbound.

From eastern Kentucky, we'd work our way on south, eventually as far as the Knoxville, Tenn., area, photographing steam on short lines including the Tennessee Railroad, Oneida & Western, Kentucky & Tennessee, and Smoky Mountain. From Knoxville we headed back northeast, visiting the Interstate Railroad and the Clinchfield, and photographing steam on the Southern and N&W. We returned to the C&O at Russell, Ky., before retracing our steps of 12 days before to Elkins and Cumberland for more Western Maryland and B&O photos. From there, we returned home directly to New Jersey, on Sunday, June 1, having put almost 4,300 miles on Collins' car's odometer. ■

More on our Web site

Movie clips of L&N M-1 "Big Emma" 2-8-4's from the Herron Rail Video archive are available on our Web site, www.classictrainsmag.com

Photo Section

Trains of Jersey Central and Lehigh Valley simultaneously hit the grade separation at Roselle Park, N.J., circa 1953. Coming at us is a Jersey City-bound CNJ commuter train behind 1918 Baldwin Camelback 4-6-0 785, while heading west overhead is an LV local that looks to be in the charge of an Alco FA. One "Valley" FA, the 590, is believed to have had a steam generator added by the railroad, which relied mostly on its 14 Alco PA's for passenger work. Today this area is "the Aldene connection," where Newark-bound NJ Transit trains leave the old CNJ line and ramp up onto the old LV.

Tom Smart photo, Dan Pope collection

Monon train 6, the Louisville-Chicago *Thoroughbred*, skims through the pastoral, no-population point of Smiths, Ind., early into its run in October 1963. The locomotive (F3 205), the first head-end car, and the coach at the end wear Monon's black-and-gold livery, said to honor on-line Purdue University. The third head-end car still wears red, white, and gray, the old passenger colors said to honor Indiana University, while the middle storage car is owned by Louisville & Nashville, which took over the Monon in 1972.

I. W. King photo, Joel King collection

Photo Section

Four photos, H. G. "Hank" Goerke, J. David Ingles collection

Alco diesels were a favorite of H. G. "Hank" Goerke, the late Detroit-area rail photographer who would pal around with CLASSIC TRAINS' Senior Editor in their youth. Both had a proclivity for "roster portraits," but Hank could take more-dynamic photos as well. Witness New York Central FA2 1109 at speed in Detroit in July 1960; Delaware & Hudson units at Mechanicville, N.Y., in September 1967; Wabash C424 B901, deep in Nickel Plate country at Bellevue, Ohio, in September 1965, a year after the Norfolk & Western merger; and Grand Trunk Western RS1 1951 at Durand, Mich., switching train 56 (at the right) in 1961, apparently on a fan-trip day. Hiding behind the D&H units is a Portland (Maine) Terminal switcher. The Wabash C424 had a "B" number because it was built for Mexico and lacked certain items, restricting it to trailing-unit status.

4077
5
NKP ROAD
WABASH
B901

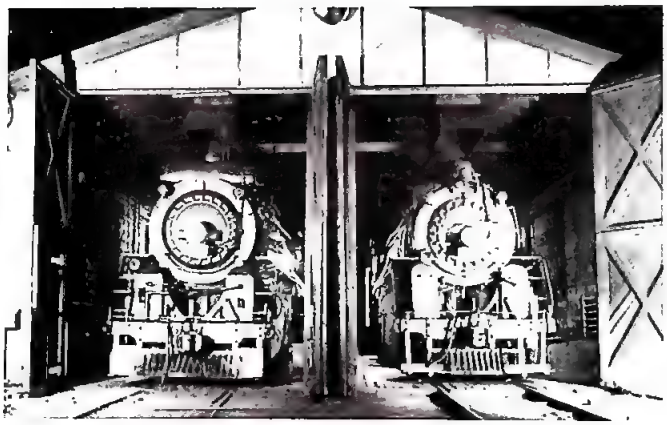
Photo Section

Two photos, M. L. "Monty" Powell, J. David Ingles collection

Illinois Central steam, even into its late days, was not all burly 2-8-2's, 4-8-2's, and 2-10-2's … if you knew where to look. The late M. L. "Monty" Powell, a Clinton, Ill., native, did. He'd become an IC operator at age 14 and later joined the Toledo, Peoria & Western, retiring from it after a long career as a dispatcher. He was known to prowl around rural Illinois with his camera, and in 1956-57 he found these gems. On December 14, 1956, Powell was down south at Reevesville, 30 miles north of Paducah, Ky., on the Bluford District, where 1903 Rogers 2-8-0 719 and 1901 Baldwin 2-6-0 3715 were ready to depart with local freights. One would head east on IC's obscure 26-mile branch to Rosiclare, Ill. Ten months later, on October 2, 1957, he was in central Illinois at Graymont, the first station west of Pontiac on a branch off "the Bloomer" (Bloomington-Otto), where 1911 Alco (Brooks) 4-6-2 2034 (left) was working.

Photo Section

Four photos, Jim Shaughnessy



The 47-mile Sydney & Louisburg, a coal-hauler at the far northeastern end of Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island, attracted many railfan photographer visitors as it continued using—into the 1960's—locomotives, some secondhand from the U.S., that burned what they hauled. On January 23, 1961 (below), the future was at hand in the form of new Montreal-built RS23 switcher 202, one of three, lettered simply "S&L Railway" on its black flanks, meeting 0-8-0 87, former Chicago & Illinois Midland, at New Aberdeen, where the mine shafts extended out 4 miles under the Atlantic Ocean. On the same evening (above), at Glace Bay's compact facilties, 2-8-2 106, ex-Michigan Central, rested inside as 94, an ex-Pittsburgh & Lake Erie 0-8-0, awaited duty outside. On September 16, 1960, S&L workers (top right) chatted behind 1928 Montreal 2-8-2 71 as they went on duty at Glace Bay, 14 months after 2-8-2's 104 and 105, both from the Detroit & Toledo Shore Line (right), reposed in a shed there, ready for duty. Five RS1's from Minneapolis & St. Louis dieselized S&L by 1962.

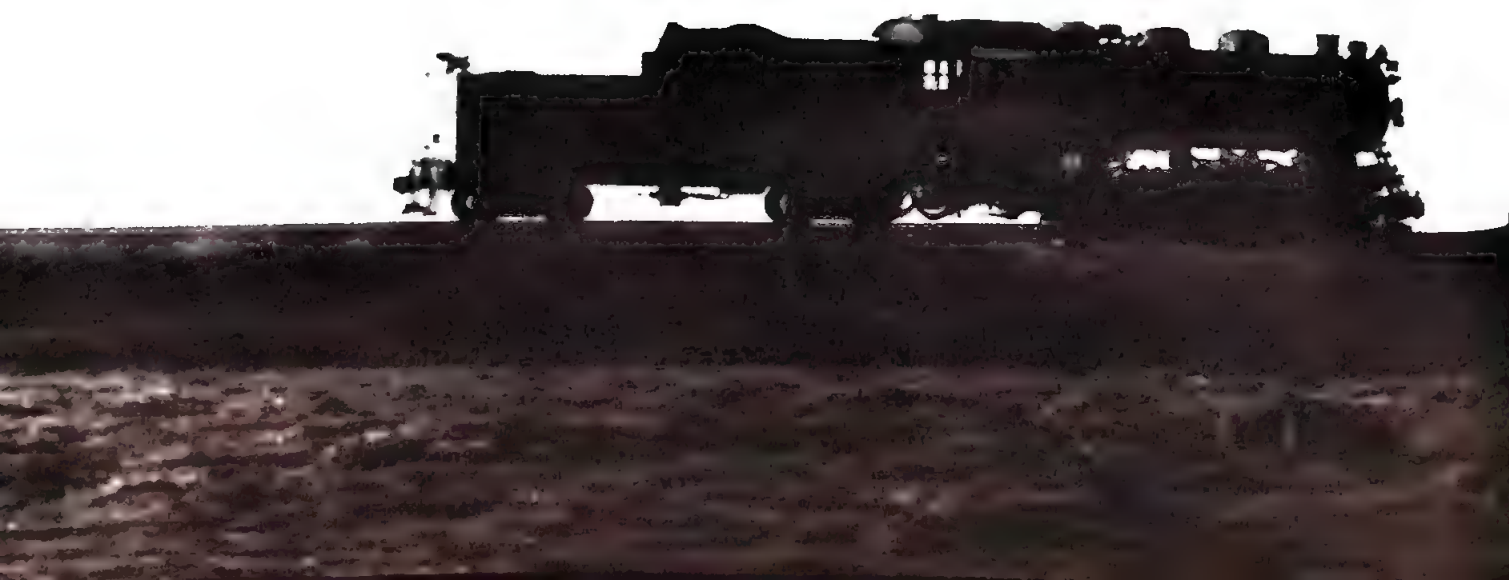


Photo Section

The Southern covered four routes with its six FM motor trains. Despite this power car being lettered "Vulcan," this is No. 19, the southbound *Goldenrod* (named for Alabama's state flower), arriving Maplesville in summer 1952; two trainsets covered the 264-mile Birmingham-Mobile run. Each motor train on the other two routes made a daily turn: *Vulcan* 152 miles each way, Meridian, Miss.-Birmingham, and *Joe Wheeler* (a Confederate hero) 167 miles each way, Tuscumbia, Ala.-Chattanooga, Tenn. The FM power cars lasted into the mid-1950's.

Robert Milner

Southern Railway train 26, the *Cracker* (left), leaves Macon (Ga.) Terminal Station for Altanta in September 1952, evidencing some changes since its October 1939 introduction. The power car is green and white, not silver; its front end rides on a three-axle truck, vs. the original 2-A1A arrangement; and it's towing not one coach but two plus an RPO. "Cracker" was colloquial for a rural Georgian. Two trains covered the daily 275-mile Brunswick-Atlanta run. The St. Louis Car power units had an 8x10-inch, 5-cylinder, 750 h.p. Fairbanks-Morse engine.

J. W. King photo, Joel King collection

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW
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Jacksonville Terminal in the 1940's

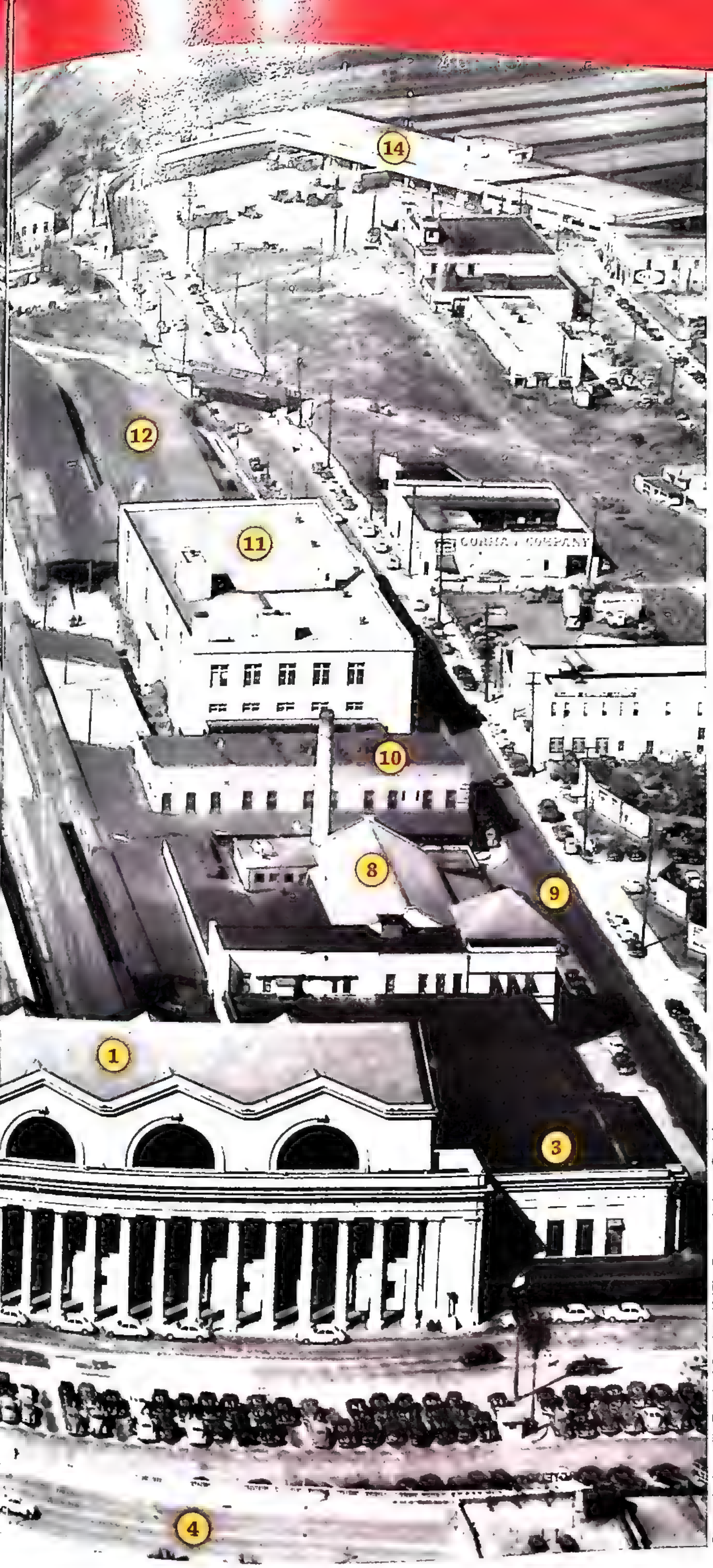

Photo: Jacksonville Terminal Co., late 1940's. Research: Larry Goolsby.

Headhouse and platforms

Jacksonville Terminal was a monument to Florida's status as the southern vacation destination of choice for the eastern half of the U.S. Few travelers got off here; instead, the city was the funnel for trains arriving over the Atlantic Coast Line, Seaboard Air Line, and Southern Railway on their way farther south to the state's east and west coasts. The grand Beaux Arts-style headhouse opened in November 1919, replacing a smaller building erected in 1904—traffic to Florida grew that rapidly. The terminal also included facilities for the Post Office, Railway Express, and Pullman; a roundhouse; three interlocking towers; and 26 station tracks. Routes entering from the north were: ACL and SAL from Savannah and Southern from Macon; from the west, SAL's main to Chattahoochee (and, via Baldwin, to other Florida points); and to the south and southwest, ACL's lines to St. Petersburg and Tampa. Finally, the Florida East Coast exited the southeast end of the terminal, carrying its own trains and, until the strike of 1963, ACL's to Miami. Most trains had to back into the depot using wyes to the north, and all through trains did so after the FEC strike. This inconvenience, as well as reduced traffic, prompted Amtrak to quit the terminal in 1974. The headhouse became part of the Prime F. Osborn III convention center in 1986.

1 Headhouse, including "White" waiting room
2 Restaurant
3 "Colored" waiting room
4 S. Lee Street
5 Office-car track
6 Through tracks (11)
7 Stub-end tracks (15)
8 Baggage room and Jacksonville Terminal Co. offices (original 1904 terminal headhouse)
9 W. Bay Street
10 ACL dining-car commissary
11 U.S. Post Office, West Bay Station
12 Mail loading tracks and sheds
13 Myrtle Avenue tower
14 Railway Express building

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW
N
6
1
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Mail and express building

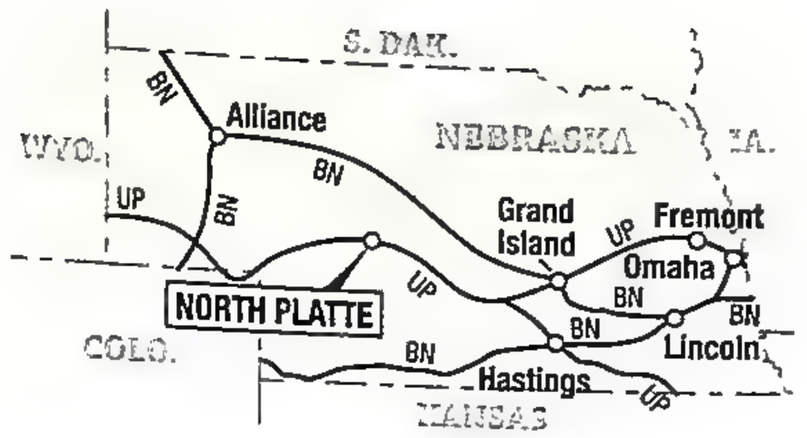
Jacksonville Terminal's mail and express business ran a close second to its passenger operations. The huge Railway Express Agency building and yard were designed handle 250 standard baggage or express cars. The terminal stayed especially busy with northbound perishables like fruit and flowers, which made up as much as 65 percent of all express traffic in the 1940's. In December 1948 alone, the terminal's 0-6-0 and EMD diesel switchers handled nearly 9,000 express cars. Myrtle Avenue Tower, the terminal's busiest interlocking plant, overlooked the narrow throat where tracks from the express facility, engine terminal, and storage yard to the northwest converged and fed into the station's through and stub-end passenger tracks to the southeast.

1 Railway Express building
2 Signal shop
3 Myrtle Avenue tower
4 Myrtle Avenue
5 JT Co. 0-6-0 switching head-end cars
6 Covered loading platforms
7 JT Co. property leased to businesses

Photo: Jacksonville Terminal Co., late 1940's. Research: Larry Goolsby.

More on our Web site
View a listing of daily passenger train arrivals and departures at Jacksonville Terminal in 1946 at our Web site, www.classictrainsmag.com

Expecting mostly UP power to pass the depot on the morning of Wednesday, May 6, 1970, the author instead was rewarded with this colorful parade of mostly foreign diesels.



One day at . . .

North Platte, Nebr.

By A. J. Wolff • Photos by the author

In May 1970 I was on leave from the U.S. Army between duty stations and decided to ride with my father from our home in Cheyenne, Wyo., on a day trip to North Platte, Nebr. He was a traveling salesman for a major health-care-product manufacturer and had to make several calls on retailers in North Platte on Wednesday, May 6. Knowing my interest in railroads, he dropped me off at the Union Pacific depot for the morning; he would pick me up after finishing his calls. I was anxious to use my new Miranda Senorex 35mm SLR camera I had purchased overseas, and I expected to see the usual parade of trains with diverse consists of UP diesels up front.

I was in for a surprise. Soon after I stepped onto the platform, the first of five eastbounds I would photograph came by, with five Burlington Northern diesels leading about four UP units. BN had become a reality just two months before, so not surprisingly, the lead four, two each GE and EMD, were still in Chicago, Burlington & Quincy red, and the fifth, a GP20, was in Great Northern orange. The Chicago-bound train would enter BN rails at Grand Island, 137 miles east.

Next, four Norfolk & Western U30B's made a smoky charge out of town. UP and N&W had begun pooling power and cabooses between North Platte and Decatur, Ill., in late 1966. When implemented, it was anticipated that the practice would save up to 12 hours of interchange time at Kansas City. On occasion, N&W units would venture west to Cheyenne.

As the sun began to move to a more southerly angle, a third eastbound appeared—finally with an all-UP consist: U50 35 plus a U28C, an SD24B, an SD40, and another GE. The twin-engine, 5,000 h.p. U50 would be retired in September 1973 after nine years of service.

The next train caught me by surprise. Up front was a high-nose SD35 lettered for Southern's Central of Georgia; a second Southern unit was in the consist, plus four Missouri Pacific SD40's. A pool arrangement among UP, MP, and SR sent UP units as far as Jacksonville, Fla.

My final train that morning had an all-GE Rock Island trio, a harbinger of what might have become reality. To gain access to Chicago, UP began studying acquiring RI in 1960. As is well known, after a torturous review process, the ICC eventually approved the merger in 1974, but UP withdrew its offer in 1975 owing to RI's decrepit physical plant.

My North Platte visit demonstrated that the pooling of power—begun by CB&Q and UP in 1959 with a Chicago-Green River, Wyo., agreement—was well established by 1970. Although the number of players has been reduced by mergers, the practice continues today.

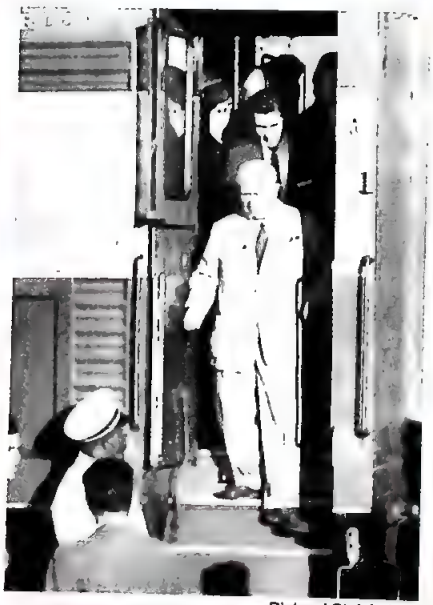
1959: Motive-power transition continues

K.C. Crist photo, J. David Ingles collection

THE NEW ORDER: Preceding the 2,000 h.p. B-B GP20 of November 1959 by 16 months, Electro-Motive in 1958 fields prototype SD24 No. 5579, a 2,400 h.p. six-motor road-switcher that will be the harbinger of road freight diesel design to this day. All but 4 of the 224 SD24's are built this year, for Santa Fe, Burlington, Southern, and Union Pacific; three demonstrators and a single unit for Kennecott Copper will follow. The first demo keeps barnstorming, sharing the Burlington's Denver engine terminal in August 1961 with some of CB&Q's 36 GP20's; UP winds up with all four demos.

FIRES QUENCHED: The conversion from steam to diesel takes more steps as the last active Pennsylvania steam locomotive, 0-6-0 5244, finishes its work on little Union Transportation Co. and ends PRR's steam era at Camden, N.J., July 14. . . . Nickel Plate Road, which returned to service several 300-series 0-8-0's at Conneaut, Ohio, ends steam forever when the goats tie up there July 18. . . . And a steam rebirth on Union Pacific ends suddenly when a steel strike decimates traffic and 4-6-6-4 3713 arrives Cheyenne, Wyo., on July 23.

THIRD RAIL UNPLUGGED: Chicago Aurora & Elgin, the Windy City's west-suburban interurban known as "the Great Third Rail," shuts down for good with a freight move on June 17 two years after the last passenger trains (July 3, 1957). Expressway construction severed CA&E's downtown Chicago entry route, and another public transit alternative dies years ahead of when it would be more appreciated.



Richard Steinheimer

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR: The Cuban Bay of Pigs episode and further Cold War tensions are still in the future when Soviet Premier Nikita Kruschchev visits the U.S.—and rides two passenger trains! After taking a Pennsylvania special from Washington, D.C., to New York on September 17, he rides one on Southern Pacific's Coast Line, from Los Angeles to San Francisco, on the 20th. That's him alighting from a vestibule of a Daylight red-and-orange parlor car in the 12-car consist at SP's Bayshore Yard.

MILESTONE: Milwaukee Road on May 19 marks the 50th anniversay of "the line that shouldn't have been built," its Pacific Extension from South Dakota to Tacoma/Seattle, Wash. The traffic-light, maintenance-heavy route, with two electrified sections and rarely more than two through freights a day, will help drag the railroad into bankruptcy 18 years hence.

PASS THE SALT: SP on July 27 makes the first run over its new Great Salt Lake fill, helping improve operation on its Overland Route.

William P. Cecil

MERGERS MARCH ON: Look closely. This is not a Virginian passenger train. The old VGN main, electric catenary and all, is at far right—this is Norfolk & Western second 15, a Christmas mail extra section heading west from Salem, Va., behind untouched VGN Fairbanks-Morse H16-44 No. 15 (one of two equipped with steam generators) on December 11, just 11 days after N&W merged the parallel 600-mile coal-hauler. . . . On December 31, Atlantic Coast Line absorbs 343-mile subsidiary Charleston & Western Carolina, its 31 ACL-style purple-and-silver diesels and all.

LANDMARK TRANSITION: Erie Railroad abandons its branch into northern Pennsylvania over 2,053-foot Kinzua Viaduct, at 301 feet the highest when built in 1882, but the landmark structure is preserved, first purchased by scrap dealer Nick Kovalchick, who would gain fame as savior of the narrow-gauge East Broad Top. Kinzua would survive, become a state park, and see tourist trains . . . until 2003, when a tornado would take down much of it.

WEST SHORE FINIS: New York Central's "West Shore" commuter sevice on the old New York, West Shore & Buffalo, up the Hudson River from Weehawken, N.J., to West Haverstraw, N.Y. (exemplified by RS12 6220 southbound in about 1956), ends on February 11.

Barney L. Stone; Krambles-Peterson Archive

Reading Railroad: Kas Heppner

"BIGGEST STAR": Amidst all the news of railroads killing their last steam fires, the Reading Company brings back a tradition, operating three "Iron Horse Ramble" excursions in Pennsylvania behind 1947 homebuilt T-1 class 4-8-4 No. 2124, beginning October 25. In a December 7 press release on the new John O'Hara movie *From the Terrace*, filmed on the Reading between Pottsville, Pa., and Philadelphia (and at CNJ's Jersey City Terminal [left], standing in for Reading Terminal in Philly), and starring Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, and Myrna Loy, the railroad says it "is considering similar trips again this spring." Indeed, two other T-1's would join in hauling the Rambles for five more years. That's General Road Foreman of Engines E. S. Watters standing above Ms. Loy.

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It was a dark and stormy night

A Chicago freight-train crew finds out what happens when a 19-year-old asks, "Why not?"

It truly was a dark and stormy night in Chicago in 1958, and I was a 19-year-old college student. Nineteen is an awkward age for a male—you're old enough to be restless but not old enough to drink legally. What do you do on a Friday night when you feel you've earned a break from a week of engineering classes? If you were a railfan and had a friend working third trick at the 14th Street Tower of the Baltimore & Ohio Chicago Terminal, the answer was easy—you piled into a car with some friends and went to visit him at work.

To appreciate what happened next you have to understand two things: the neighborhood around the tower and the mentality of a 19-year-old college male.

The tower was in a somewhat secluded industrial area on the city's near west side. One reached it by driving down a street which dead-ended at the railroad embankment, then climbing up and crossing the tracks to the tower. At night it was quiet . . . and perhaps a bit spooky. It was not exactly the best place to take pictures. As to a 19-year-old's mentality, suffice to say that most are somewhat uninhibited. If someone offers a suggestion, the typical reply is, "Why not?"

There is one more important point: Those were the last days of steam. One had to seize every opportunity.

So it came to pass that a bit after midnight on that dark, stormy, cold night, several of us were in the tower enjoying ourselves. It was not our practice to stay more than an hour or so, just long enough to down a pizza. On this night, my B&OCT employee friend said there would be a freight train coming out of the Robey Street Yard east of the tower which usually had steam for power. "Wanna take a picture?" "Why not?"

To keep from getting my friend into hot water, I walked about 100 yards down the track. Back then we used flashbulbs, and Kodachrome 25 was considered a fairly fast color film. I loaded the flashgun and waited. It started to snow. Sure enough, here it came, a B&O 4-8-2. It's hard to describe what it's like to be at trackside in the dark with a working steam engine coming at you. It's great! I raised my camera and . . . *POW*—I lit up the front of that engine like a searchlight. I ejected the flashbulb, popped in another one, and advanced the film.

Two photos, Edward J. Prendergast

As the caboose passed, the rear brakeman was leaning out to give the fireman a highball with his lantern. *POW!* He got his picture taken. I walked back to the tower through the thickening snow.

A few minutes later the tower's telephone rang. I don't know who was on the line, but he wanted to know what the hell was going on at 14th Street. My friend matter-of-factly said he thought there might be some kids around taking pictures. It then occurred to us that discretion might be the better part of valor. We departed.

The next summer, I went to work for the Milwaukee Road as a relief tower operator. It never occurred to me to take pictures at the towers where I worked . . . but of course, the Milwaukee no longer ran steam.—*Edward J. Prendergast*

POW—a 19-year-old's flashbulb lights up the front end of 4-8-2 709 at B&OCT's 14th Street tower on a snowy night. And *POW* again—caboose C1406 and the rear brakeman get the same treatment.

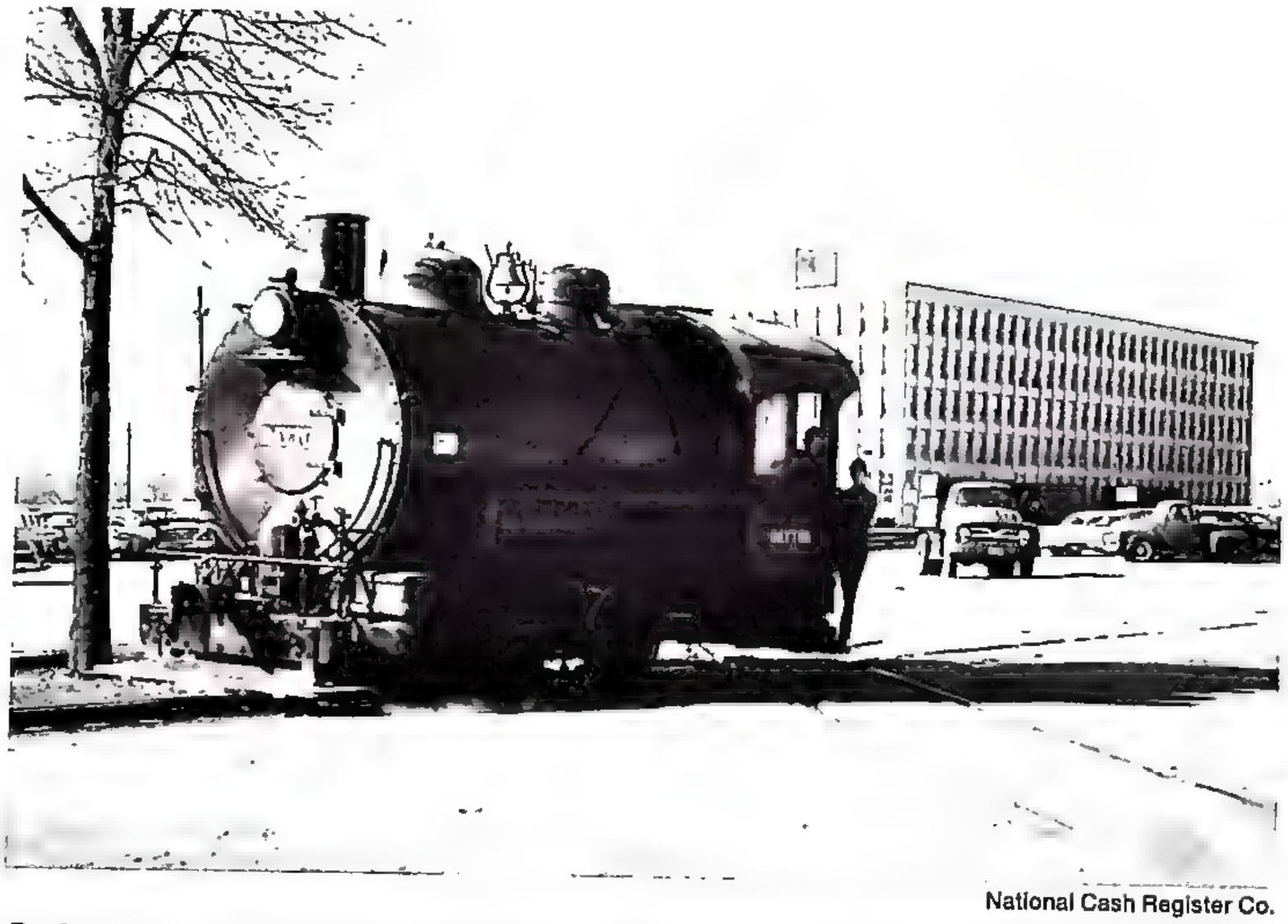
Canned steam at "The Cash"

Fireless industrial engines entertained a college student in Dayton

I attended the University of Dayton, just two blocks up Stewart Street from the National Cash Register Co. that had been started by John M. Patterson. A great leader, Mr. Patterson nevertheless did have his odd ways.

Now the NCR plant, or "The Cash" as it was known, handled large volumes of raw materials and needed rail service after closure of the Miami Erie Canal. This was obtained from the adjacent Pennsylvania Railroad, whose line ran from Cincinnati through Lebanon to Dayton. Locomotives were needed to move cars inside the plant, but Mr. Patterson didn't like the smoke from steam engines, so he contacted the Lima Locomotive Works and had Lima build three little fireless 0-4-0's. He named them *Dayton*, *Rubicon*, and *South Park*.

The switchers were filled from NCR's steam plant. The locomotives, first half filled with hot water and then charged with 120 psi steam, could operate at 60 psi through a reducing valve for three to four hours. Stack exhaust was nothing but clean water vapor. Compressed air, to apply sand to the track, came from storage reservoirs located under the walkways; this, too was supplied from the power house. This avoided wasting steam to drive an air pump. How did they stop, you ask? Well, in the cab was a big ship's wheel that wound up a chain on a drum and activated the driving-wheel brakes solely by the engineer's physical effort.



National Cash Register Co.

***Dayton* trundles through the NCR plant; steam was supplied at the valve above the pilot beam.**

I would watch these little fellows shuffle a few freight cars from one siding to another during breaks between afternoon classes in the spring and fall of 1954-58.

NCR's track was standard-gauge, the same as used throughout Dayton by all railroads, streetcars, and interurbans. After the great 1913 flood, Mr. Patterson loaned his fireless locomotives to the city to aid in the cleanup and removal of flood debris. They simply ran on the streetcar tracks, pushing or pulling a few open gondola cars. At this time, the city power plant was out of service and 600 volts was not available at the trolley wire.

The Cash's canned-steam 0-4-0's were part of the Dayton scene until diesel power replaced them in the early 1960's.—*Harry V. Noble*

First train to Tower Grove usually wins

It's MoPac vs. Frisco in a 1941 race to St. Louis Union Station

What could be more exiting to an 11-year-old who loved trains than a full-fledged passenger-train race? Forget about the famous one departing Chicago's Englewood Union Station eastward between the famous crack New York Central and Pennsylvania Railroad flyers—those are already well documented. "My" race, though with trains not as prestigious, was much longer, about 35 miles. Moreover, it often ended in a dead heat.

The combatants were Missouri Pacific and Frisco trains approaching St. Louis from the south in early morning. From suburban Tower Grove eastward for the first few miles, the railroads ran almost parallel and the passengers on both would soon be caught up in the competition. The train crews would wave and gesture to each other, and the whistle sounds were added flavor to the competition.

A July 1941 trip to St. Louis to visit relatives and attend a St. Louis Browns vs. Boston Red Sox baseball game at Sportsmans Park (in which I saw Bos-

ton's Ted Williams hit a home run) was just one of the times I witnessed this galvanizing race, but it was perhaps the most memorable. An hour before our scheduled arrival at St. Louis Union Station, some 6.6 miles north of De Soto, Mo., near Hematite on Missouri Pacific's old "Iron Mountain" line, is where the race began. I was aboard MP train 18/28, the combined (at Knobel, Ark.) *Hot Springs Special* and *Tennessean*.

At that location, the MP track passed under the Frisco's "River Line" which came up from Memphis to St. Louis, and suddenly our train was being passed overhead by Frisco 806, the *Memphian*, with an eight-car consist behind 4-6-2 Pacific No. 1025: four head-end cars, two coaches, a snack-lounge, and one 16-section Pullman. Our train was made up of a 4-8-2 Mountain type locomotive, No. 5338, and 12 cars: five head-end, three coaches, three Pullmans, and a coach-cafe-lounge. The four Memphis cars had been switched into the middle of the train at Knobel.

Shortly after it went overhead on a wooden trestle, the Frisco train was slightly behind us, with both trains traveling about 60 to 65 mph. The Frisco then veered off toward the northwest, which resulted in it coming into Tower Grove from a southwest direction, scheduled to make the suburban stop at 7:18 a.m. Our train was due into Tower Grove at 7:21 and had a more difficult route to follow, including 20 miles along the Mississippi River. Our train also had three conditional stops, to discharge passengers only, but on this morning we made none of them. If only one of those stops were made, the MoPac train would lose the race into St. Louis Union Station. The winner was usually determined by the first train to receive a clear signal at the Frisco-MoPac crossing just west of the separate depots at Tower Grove, although getting past Lindenwood Yard in St. Louis sometimes delayed the Frisco train.

On the morning in question, we arrived first at Tower Grove and quickly discharged our passengers. Just as we began to move, I saw the smoke from the Frisco engine from over at the Frisco station as it pulled in with train

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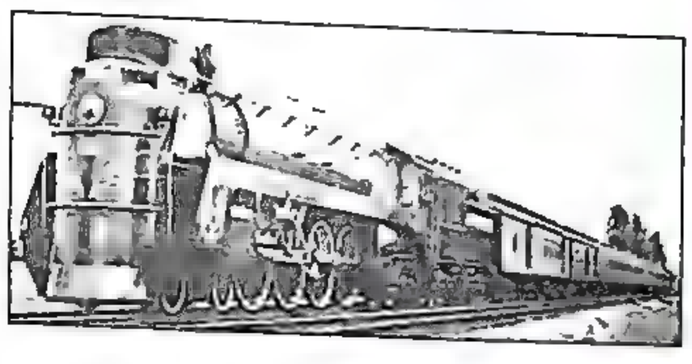

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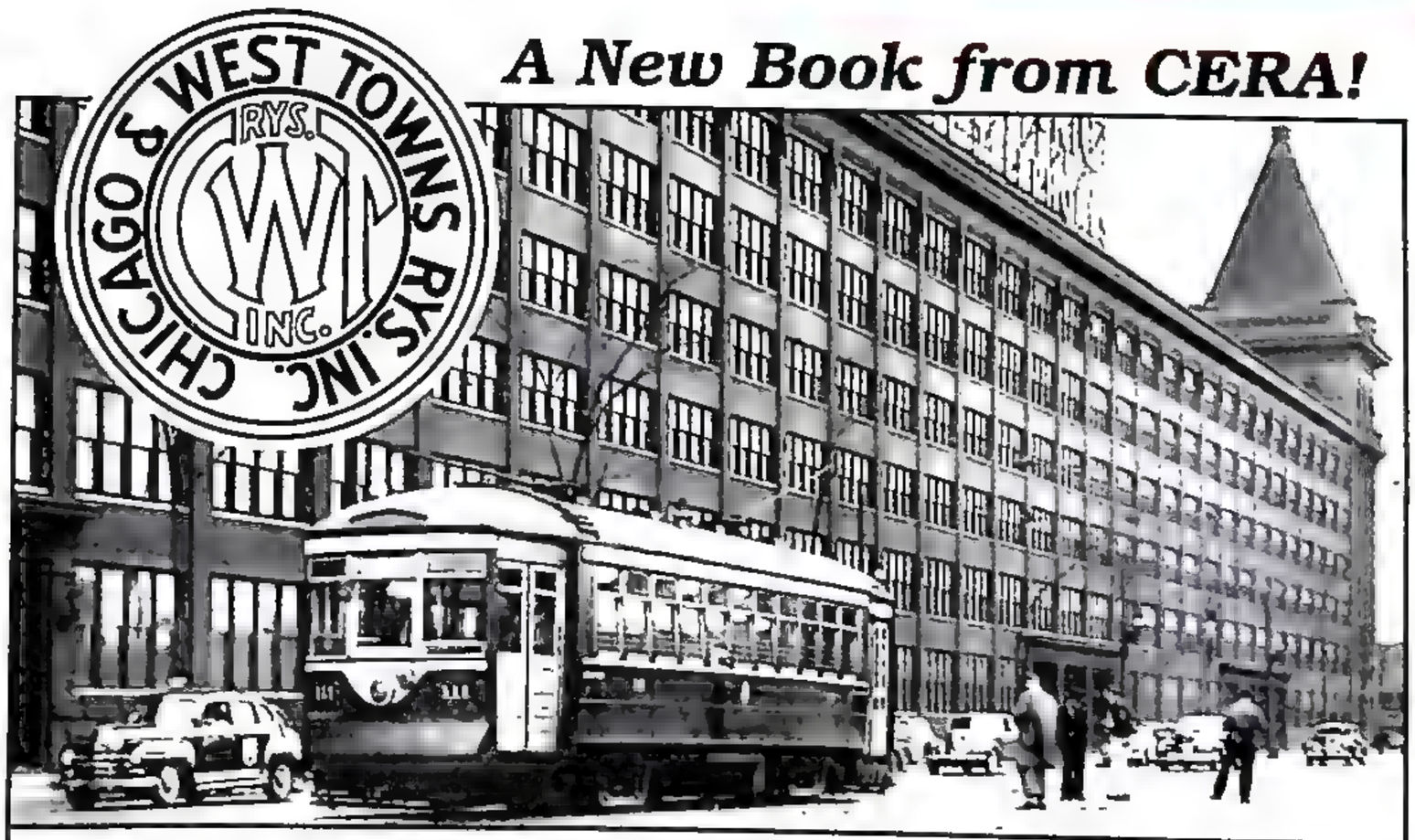

The Chicago & West Towns Railways

By James J. Buckley Edited by Richard W. Aaron

Eight miles west of Chicago's Loop, 17 long-established communities were served by a street railway and bus system whose roots can be traced back to the late 19th century. For many, Chicago & West Towns Railways was the "family car," with five major streetcar lines providing convenient and inexpensive transportation to communities like Oak Park, River Forest, Forest Park, Maywood, Cicero, Berwyn, Brookfield, and LaGrange. CERA's newest book illustrates the West Towns story with more than 350 photos and illustrations, with many in full color.

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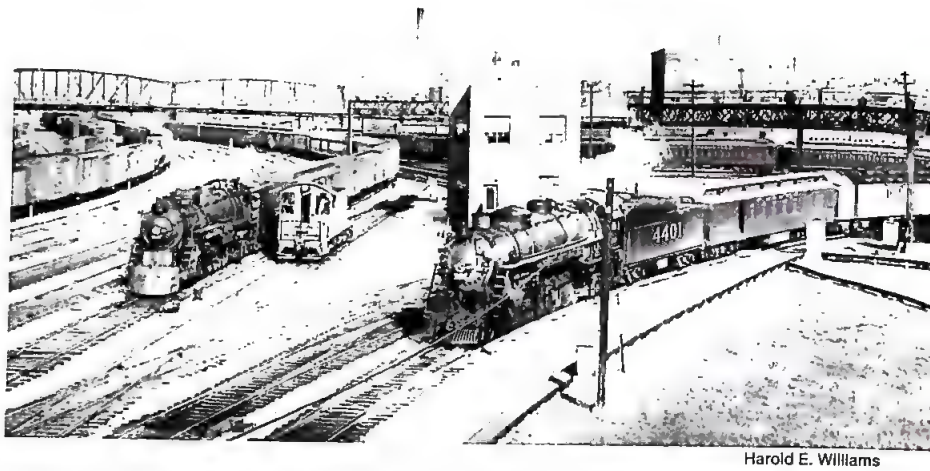
806. We got a slight head start from Tower Grove before I heard the Frisco "highball" of two short toots from the whistle. Thus did the final lap begin for the Grand Avenue junction, where the Terminal Railroad Association trackage started.

Now, progress from Grand Avenue to the east end of the wye tracks, where trains backed into Union Station, depended on the TRRA dispatchers. Luckily we got green signals and came to a stop just as the Frisco train pulled up alongside us not 10 seconds later! The race was over. We won!

In a way, the race was not the highlight of our St. Louis arrival, at least to this 11-year-old, for when we finally stopped under Union Station's giant trainshed, we were greeted by no fewer then a half dozen round-end observation cars of streamliners either having just arrived or making ready to depart. The St. Louis morning lineup included the likes of MoPac's *Eagle*, Illinois Central's *Green Diamond*, Alton's *Abraham Lincoln*, and Burlington's *Mark Twain Zephyr*, *Zephyr Rocket*, and *Pioneer Zephyr*. What a sight!



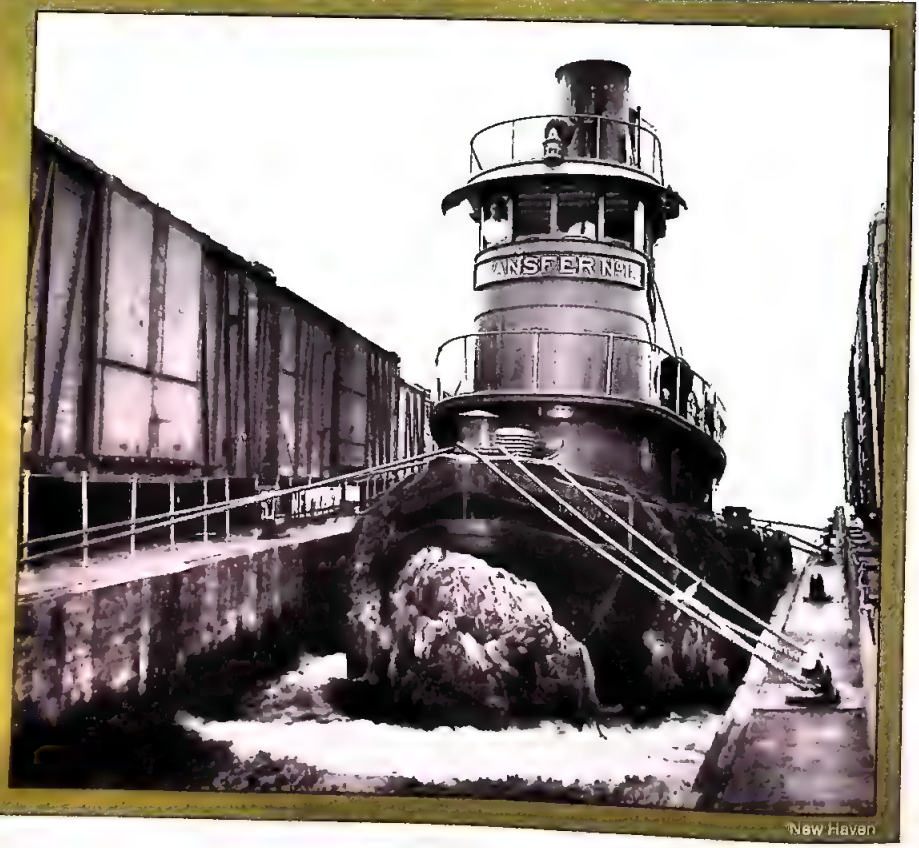
Harold E. Williams

St. Louis, late 1940's: After a "race" not as close as the one John Mills saw in '41, MP 5327 rolls the *Missourian* past a TRRA diesel as Frisco 4401 backs the *Will Rogers* into Union Station.

And oh yes, competitive action also was known to take place on MoPac's and Frisco's lines westward, between Pacific, Mo., Tower Grove, and St. Louis, with MP 16, the *Sunflower*, and Frisco 2, the *Texas Special*, as well as other trains on those almost-parallel lines.—*John A. Mills*

Where the Whyte system wouldn't work

Frederick M. Whyte's system of describing steam locomotive wheel arrangements could handle anything from an 0-4-0 to a 2-8-8-8-4, but some steam-driven railroad motive power was beyond its capability. Take the New Haven's *Transfer No. 14* (tugboats were "transfers" on the NH), pictured shepherding two carfloats down New York City's East River in the early 1940's. Built in 1900 by Bath (Maine) Iron Works, she and sister *No. 15* were the biggest of 21 steam tugs the NH deployed in New York Harbor beginning in 1878. Powered by two engines and measuring 120 feet long, *Transfer No. 14* is a substantial machine, capable of moving dozens of freight cars at a time. She lacks wheels, of course, so Whyte would ignore her, but to the New Haven, she's just as much a freight hauler as its 4-8-2's and 2-10-2's.



New Haven

Policing the *Olympian Hi*

Boys will be boys, as an MP found on a Milwaukee Road train

When the Korean conflict was halted by a truce in 1953, there was a rush to get most of our troops home. In those days before widespread use of airplanes, the returning soldiers came back to the U.S. by ship, mostly landing in the Seattle area. From there, the railroads took them homeward.

To get troops from Seattle to Chicago, the Army mostly used Milwaukee Road's *Olympian Hiawatha* and Great Northern's *Western Star*, as it was probably easier to obtain space on them than it was on GN's premier *Empire Builder* or Northern Pacific's *North Coast Limited*.

In fall 1953, I was a Military Policeman, assigned to a small detachment in Minneapolis, and I was told that I was going to be assigned as an MP aboard one of the trains. My duty was to check for proper passes of all service personnel aboard and to keep order among them.

I drew the *Olympian Hi*, and the program went like this. In the morning, I would catch the Chicago-bound train in Minneapolis, relieving the MP on board, if there was one. Once in Chicago, I had about a two-hour layover at Union Station, then I would board the westbound *Olympian Hi*. As we left the Chicago area, I would follow the conductor around, checking any military personnel on board. After I checked the full length of the train, including the Pullmans, I would approach the senior military officer on the train and appoint him as "Train Commander." I think that this was done as a courtesy so the officer wouldn't feel the MP was really in charge.

I spent a lot of the time in a bedroom in the Skytop lounge observation car, provided by the railroad for the exclusive use of the MP.

Finally, at Miles City, Mont., I would be relived by an MP from Fort Lawton

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Milwaukee Road

Models posed in the lounge of a Milwaukee Road Skytop sleeper-observation car appear to be better-behaved than some of the soldiers who rode the *Olympian Hi* after the Korean War.

in Seattle, who would take the train west from there. After about 8 hours, which I spent at the Miles City firehouse, I would reboard the eastbound *Olympian Hi* for Minneapolis, where I would be relived by an MP from my detachment. Since I liked trains, those 48 hours weren't too bad, and at Minneapolis, I had 48 hours free until my next duty on board. I was put in this duty for only about four weeks around Thanksgiving and six weeks for Christmas and New Year's.

On my first trip out of Chicago, I was following the conductor on his rounds, and following me was a nice-looking, middle-aged woman, telling me how much she admired soldiers in uniform. As we went along, she asked me how long I would be on the train. After I answered, she asked, "Where do you sleep?" I told her I had a room. She then said she was a coach passenger and had never seen a room on a train and would like to see mine. I respectfully declined and went about my duties.

A short time later, I was invited to have coffee with the dining-car steward, but little did I know he was known as "the Romeo of the railroad." When I told him about the woman who'd been following me, he said, "I have a room like yours in the dormitory car," and he offered to show it to her. I found her and told her of the steward's offer, and off they went. Later, the steward contacted me and told me dinner was on him that night!

As it turned out, *all* my meals on that trip were gratis. Further, on my next trip, as I went through the dining car on my initial check, the steward, a different one from the previous trip, told me that all my meals would be on the house, because he knew I "was a good guy." Evidently dining-car stewards had a solid line of communication among them!

One memorable moment of my times on the *Olympian Hi* occurred in the Skytop lounge at the rear of the train. Sitting there, enjoying the ride, was the famous movie actor, Pat O'Brien. He said hello to me, so I stopped and chatted for a while. It happened that I was a fan of his, and I told him so; he turned out to be a very nice person.

On one trip I had just turned in for

the night when there was a loud knock on my bedroom door and a voice yelling for the MP. It was the flagman, who was a very religious person. He excitedly told me there was a soldier up in the dome car with an older woman and "they are doing things they shouldn't do in public." I put my uniform and boots back on and went to investigate. What I found was an Army sergeant and a female sans a few articles of clothing, alone in the Super Dome. The sergeant had a lower berth in a sleeper, and the woman was a coach passenger. I ordered them to return to their respective cars (although I had no authority over the civilian woman), and they left the dome. I went back to my room.

Then came another knock on my door, the flagman again. "Now they're in the bar downstairs," meaning the one under the dome. Again I ordered them to return to their cars and told the sergeant that if he did not do so, I would arrest him because I wanted my sleep. He said he would comply, and the flagman told me he would occasionally check the berth to make sure the sergeant was still in it. I was not awakened again that night.

The next morning, as I was walking through the sergeant's car, I noticed a different soldier getting out of the sergeant's berth. I stopped and asked him what was going on, and he replied that he and the sergeant had served together in Korea and that "in the middle of the night, the s.o.b. woke me up and made me change bunks with him." It turned out this soldier originally had a berth in another car.

Later I saw the sergeant and congratulated him on outwitting me. I just got a great big smile in return.

Only once did I have to arrest a military person, a young Army second lieutenant who was intoxicated and trying to pick up women on the train. I handcuffed him so I could control him. The conductor, at the next stop, had the station agent call the local police, who took the man into custody on my orders. We then had the agent telegraph my headquarters in Minneapolis relating what I had done. Headquarters would then send a team to the town to pick up the prisoner and start him into the Army justice system. I would be called for the officer's court martial, but I later learned he had resigned his commission and no further action was taken.

On one trip eastbound, the porter in the Skytop told me a drunken woman had propositioned him, but he liked his job too much to have anything to do with her, so he escorted her to her bedroom and left her there. Our next stop was Aberdeen, S.Dak., a service stop for the *Hi*, so we were there for about 15 minutes, giving me a chance to walk around a bit. Suddenly I heard a commotion on the platform. A group of the workers servicing the train had gathered beside one of the sleeping cars, where a woman—the same one, it turned out—was prancing around, completely nude. The religious flagman was there yelling for everyone to close their eyes or they would go "straight to hell." The train had to go on, so our little show was over. (One of the good things about the *Olympian Hiawatha* during this period is that it was almost always on time, without a padded schedule.)

My tour aboard the *Hi* ended in January 1954, so I sadly left the rails and resumed my duties as a Military Police Investigator.—*John P. McMahan*

An accidental beginning

Two mishaps in a month did not scare off a new SP fireman

As an 18-year-old kid going firing on Southern Pacific's Coast Division in 1953, my life was just one big adventure. Had I believed in jinxes, however, I might not have been so enthusiastic. Before my first two months on the job had passed, I'd already been involved in two mainline wrecks.

The first occurred on August 19 on the San Francisco Peninsula double-track main. I'd been called for 2 a.m. on duty for a TBX (Trans-Bay extra,

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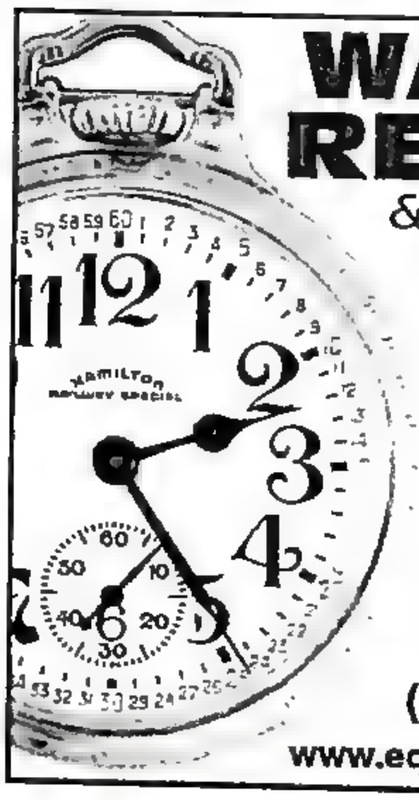

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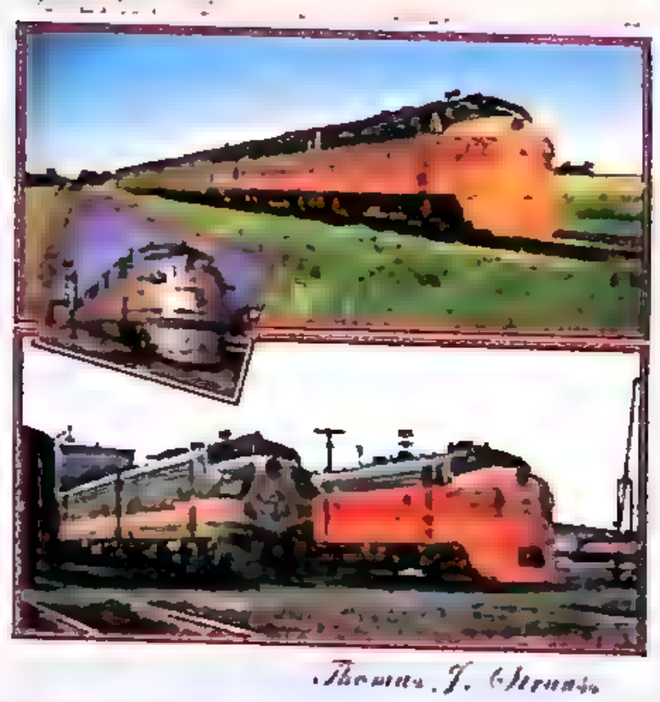

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Jim Shaughnessy

San Francisco to West Oakland) from Bayshore Yard, engine 4376, with about 80 cars. The clean-firing 4-8-2 was a fast runner, and this promised to be a smooth trip. We cleared the yard limits, and engineer Perkins soon had a roll on 'em as we highballed down the Peninsula.

As we rounded a left-hand curve at Millbrae, the head brakeman standing in the gangway behind me and I both looked back over the train expecting to report "all black," but what we saw was a great shower of sparks erupting about mid-train. Just as we turned to shout at the engineer, the brakes went into emergency and we ground to an abrupt halt.

We couldn't see a thing in the predawn darkness, so the engineer sent the head brakeman back to investigate. On the horizon ahead, the headlight of train 105, the first of 20 inbound morning commute trains, was just showing at Burlingame. I hustled out with torpedoes and fusees to get him stopped.

As dawn gradually illuminated the scene, I climbed atop the tender to have a look to the rear. There lay about 20 cars of our train scattered across both mains with cars upside down, standing on end, and tossed every-which-way. A couple of reefers filled with beer had broken open and spilled their contents along the right of way.

The wreck completely plugged both main lines for a couple of days, resulting in hundreds of San Francisco-bound commuters being late to work. The morning *Daylight* was cancelled and the westbound *Starlight* and *Lark* were diverted to West Oakland via the Dumbarton Bridge.

Although the crew in the caboose had been shaken up, no one had been hurt. Several hours later, we continued on to West Oakland, a forlorn train of just 17 cars with an empty gondola carrying the markers.

Later investigation determined a loose brake beam on one of the boxcars had dropped into the frog of a switch. At 50 mph, that causes one heck of a wreck!

Barely a month later, the second incident occurred. With a slack traffic season in late summer, I'd been cut off the fireman's extra board and loaned out to the Sacramento Division, working out of Roseville.

On a hot September afternoon at Gerber, Calif., just north of Tehama where SP's West Valley and East Valley lines diverge, I was called to fire the 4228, a cab-forward. We were the second engine of a light doubleheader running as Extra 4208, routed down the West Valley line to return to Roseville via Davis and Sacramento. Most freight traffic moved over the single-track East Valley line via Marysville, but because we were just a light-engine move, the dispatcher routed us over the quiet West Valley route usually reserved for passenger trains and locals.

Firing the second engine of a light doubleheader is pretty easy work. Because the tender ahead obscures the view, the engine crew doesn't even have to call signals.

With just a spot fire to keep up steam, I was pretty relaxed, watching the scen-

Transition zone on the Rio Grande

At Alamosa, Colo., north end of the Denver & Rio Grande's 29 miles of dual-gauge track up from Antonito, GP7 5104 rolls a short freight past K-36 Mikado 484 on August 23, 1963. Those 29 miles are a magical transition zone where narrow gauge and standard, steam and diesel, and past and future coexist. After the Geep passes, heading into the standard-gauge world of roller bearings, centralized traffic control, and diesel locomotives, the Mike will move out toward its narrow-gauge realm, where wooden cars, sweat and muscle, and steam get the job done. Happily, parts of both worlds are still with us: Cumbres & Toltec Scenic 2-8-2's haul tourists west from Antonito, while new short line San Luis & Rio Grande runs freight and tourist trains north of Antonito.

ery roll by. We'd just passed through the little town of Arbuckle when all hell broke loose. There was a great crashing noise, and rocks and gravel came flying past the window. We came to a screeching halt.

Climbing down from the cab, I immediately saw that the 4208 had thrown a connecting rod. I wouldn't have believed heavy steel could be twisted like that! The rod was bent in a "U" shape and had destroyed the ends of every eighth or tenth tie where it had struck revolving with the wheel. It had sheared the piping on the engineer's side clear down to the boiler lagging. Fortunately, it had not hit the cab, or the engineer would have joined the angels.

With the dispatcher's blessing, we pulled the 4208 back to the nearest siding where its crew would wait for the roundhouse gang from Roseville to arrive by truck, then we proceeded to Roseville as Extra 4229 West.

I fervently hoped not all my railroad career would be this exciting!

—Barry Anderson

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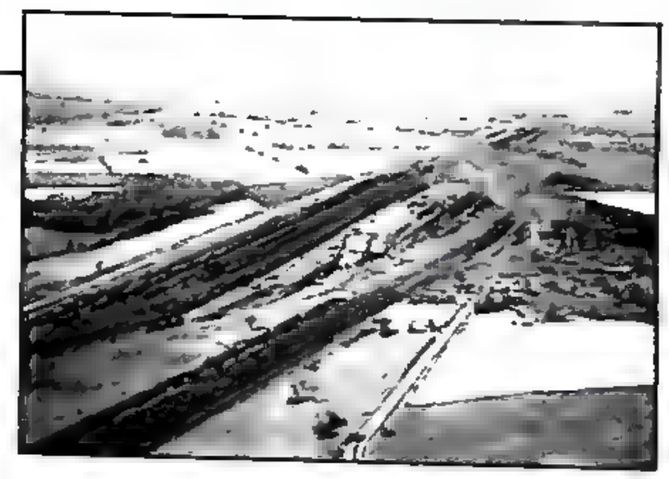

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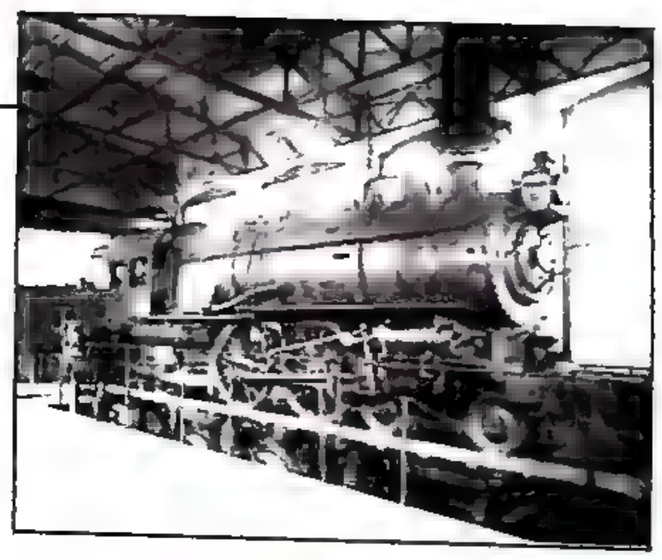

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Car Stop

Public servants in New Jersey

The many streetcar lines centered on Hoboken and Newark, N.J., were consolidated into the Public Service Railway in 1907. With buses gaining popularity, PSRy became Public Service Coordinated Transport in 1928. Ten years later only eight trolley routes remained, four on the Hudson Division (Hoboken) and four on the Essex Division (Newark). Three of the Essex lines operated into downtown Newark over the City Subway, 4.5 miles of private right of way both above and below ground, which opened in May 1935; the fourth was Subway-only. The last Essex streetcar line went bus in March 1952, leaving only the Subway, which is still going strong today under NJ Transit auspices. Below, car 2671 (PSRy shops, 1917) keeps company with a Hensler Beer truck and a woman with a baby stroller in West Orange in July 1950; lettering on 2671's side touts the advantages of Subway operation. At right, in another July 1950 view, car 8015 (Cincinnati Car Co., 1918) turns on the Erie Loop, named for its proximity to the Erie Railroad's West Orange station, just visible behind the red and white sign. Below right, immaculately maintained PCC car No. 2 (built by St. Louis Car in 1946 for Twin Cities Rapid Transit, acquired by Public Service with 29 TCRT sisters in 1954) skims along the Subway, built on the bed of the old Morris Canal, on June 21, 1957.

R. V. Mehlenbeck photo, Krambles-Peterson Archive

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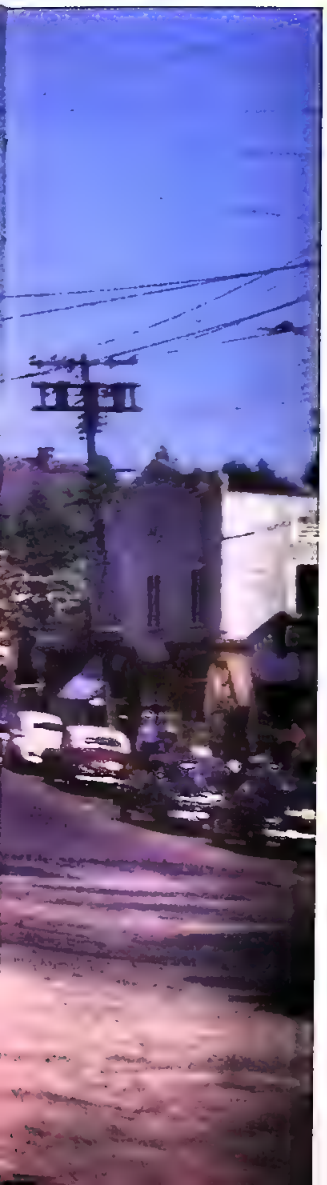

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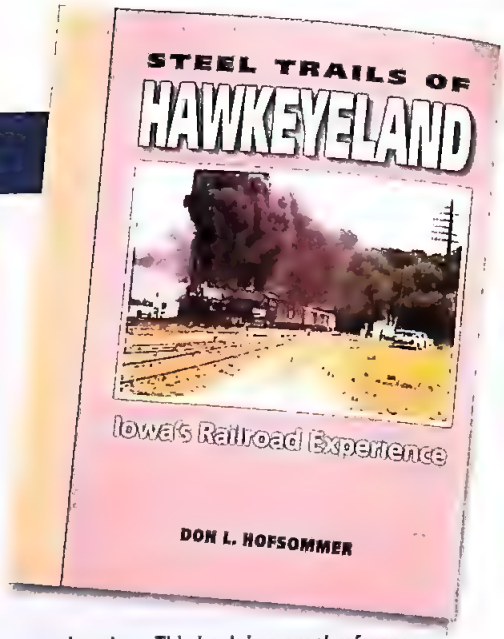

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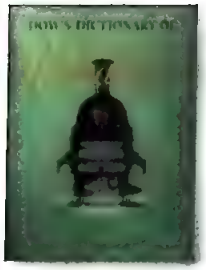
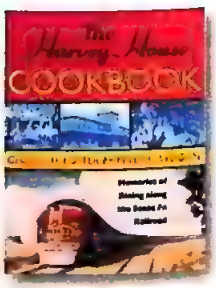
Steel Trails of Hawkeyeland: Iowa's Railroad Experience, by Don L. Hofsommer. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind.; www.iupress.indiana.edu; (800) 842-6796; 8½ x 11 in.; hardcover; 354 pages; $75.

Other Books



Britain gave us railways and our language, so it's fitting that a Briton has compiled the first major compendium of rail-related quotations. Andrew Dow, former Head of the National Railway Museum in York, has included more than 3,400 entries, ranging in time from 1608 (!) to the present, drawn from some 1,300 writers. The wide range of British and American sources includes books, articles, poetry, advertisements, obituaries, speeches, films, office memoranda, newspapers and more. This is a major contribution to railroad literature, and I expect my copy to become dog-eared from frequent use.—*Robert S. McGonigal*

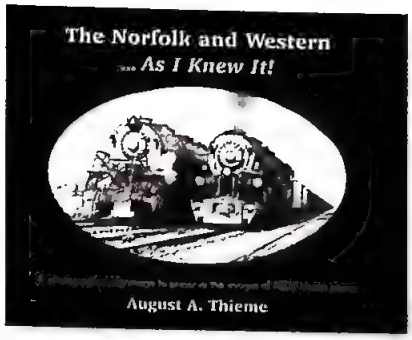
Dow's Dictionary of Railway Quotations, compiled and edited by Andrew Dow. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Md.; www.press.jhu.edu; (410) 516-4162; 7 x 9 in.; hardcover; 354 pages; $45.



Fred Harvey's hotel and restaurant chains revolutionized dining in the early American West, and this book provides more than 200 recipes from his legendary establishments. Included are entrees (beef, veal, pork, lamb, poultry, seafood, and rabbit), appetizers, soups, salads, pasta, and vegetables. The book also includes informational chapters on Fred Harvey, Harvey Houses, Harvey Girls, and early train travel, with several vintage black-and-white images showing the interiors and exteriors of Harvey's trackside hotels and restaurants.—*J.W.*

The Harvey House Cookbook, 2nd Edition, by George H. Foster and Peter C. Weiglin. Taylor Trade Publishing, Lanham, Md.; www.rlpgtrade.com; (301) 459-5743; 7 x 9 in.; softcover; 194 pages; $14.95.

For a big subject—the magnificent legacy of N&W steam—a big book. More than 145 black-and-white photos are here, one to a page, all the work of August Thieme, a native of Richmond, Va., who began taking pictures in 1943. Accordingly, the east end of the N&W, ignored by most fans who flocked to the road in the 1950's, is especially well covered. The "big three" of N&W steam—classes A, J, and Y—are here, but there are also plenty of E's, K's, M's, S's, W's, and Z's. And not one diesel.—*R.S.M.*

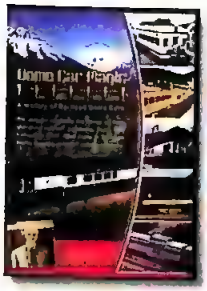


The Norfolk & Western . . . As I Knew It! by August A. Thieme. Norfolk & Western Historical Society, Roanoke, Va.; www.nwhs.org; (540) 342-0575; 14 x 11 in.; hardcover; 170 pages; $64.95.

This book offers an entertaining look at the history and operations of Montreal's streetcar systems. Along with a narrative text describing the history of various lines and locations, the book includes related news items from local papers and other period publications. The book's 54 photos, including 23 in color, show a variety of cars, locations, streets, and scenes. The photos are nicely reproduced, and it's always fun to see color images of period operations. A 16 x 21-inch foldout color map of the Montreal area helps place the operations and photos in perspective.—*J.W.*

Montreal Streetcars, Vol. 2: People and Places, by J.R. Thomas Grumley. Bytown Railway Society Inc., Ottawa, Ontario; www.bytownrailwaysociety.com; (613) 745-1201; 11 x 8½ in.; softcover; 36 pages; $14.95.

DVD's



This DVD traces the history of the dome car, starting with its inspiration and a look at *Silver Dome*, the first dome car, converted from a flat-top coach by the Burlington Route. The documentary traces how railroads used dome cars to lure passengers back to railroad travel, and looks at the new dome-equipped trains placed in service following World War II. Lots of period black-and-white and color film clips show these cars and trains in action, as the program traces the cars' history through today, looking at the remaining cars still in service. This professionally done documentary is narrated by actor and railfan Michael Gross, and is a pleasant program to watch.—*J.W.*

Dome Car Magic. RK Publishing/Luckin Productions, 621 Cascade Ct., Golden, CO 80403-1581; DVD; 26 minutes; $19.95.

Noted rail photographer Warren McGee ["Great Photographers," Fall 2003 CLASSIC TRAINS] is well known for documenting the Northern Pacific in the West. This DVD includes 134 of McGee's color images from the end of the steam era in the 1950's through Burlington Northern operations in the early '90's. The DVD includes narration by McGee (recorded during a slide presentation of the same images at the NPRHA 2005 convention), and also includes a booklet with captions for each image.—*J.W.*

Warren McGee's Northern Pacific. Northern Pacific Railway Historical Association, Plymouth, Minn.; www.nprha.org; (206) 860-1221; DVD; 143 images, 153 minutes; $29.95.

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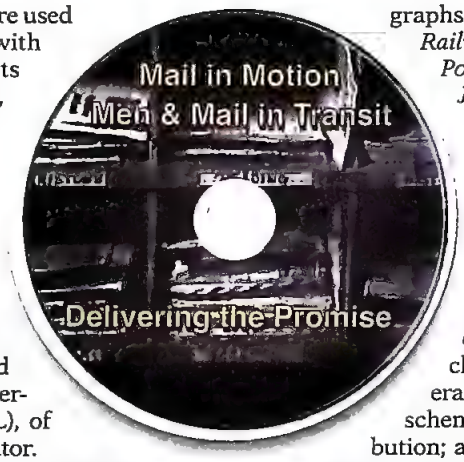
A gold mine of rail-mail information

Got a question about mail trains? The Railway Mail Service Library can probably help



Although we are used to dealing with many aspects of railroad history, this special issue on the movement and sortation of mail by rail took us into areas with which we were less familiar. So we were very grateful to learn of Frank R. Scheer and the Railway Mail Service Library (RMSL), of which he is the curator.

The RMSL is a major collection of material pertaining to en route distribution history. Incorporated in May 2003, it can assist researchers interested in route agent, seapost, railway, and highway post office history. The collection has many unique, original source documents pertaining to the transportation and distribution of mail in the U.S. between 1862 and 1977, as well as other countries during the 19th and 20th centuries. Its principal activities are assisting research inquiries, organizing and filing the collection, and the preservation of materials.

The RMSL grew from the AmeRPO ("American RPO") Society Library, established in the early 1950's by Bryant Alden Long, co-author, with William Jefferson Dennis, of the landmark book *Mail by Rail* (Simmons-Bordman, 1951). Long's collection was acquired by Hershel Rankin, who renamed it the R.M.S. Library. When Rankin was no longer able to handle research requests, Frank R. Scheer purchased the collection and moved it from Florida to Virginia and gave it its present name.

The RMSL has every major book published about the Railway Mail Service and its successor, the Postal Transportation Service. It also has many periodical articles written about en-route distribution, and continually seeks ones that are not represented. In addition the RMSL has six types of original-source material: 1) Photographs; 2) issues of *The Railway Post Office* and *Postal Transportation Journal* spanning 1905-1959; 3) oral recollections of former clerks on audio and video tapes, as well as movies about the RMS and PTS; 4) general orders describing weekly changes within several RMS divisions; 5) schemes of mail distribution; and 6) schedules of mail trains and routes. Also in the collection are artifacts such as postmarking handstamps, pouch locks, and clerk badges.

Since October 2003 the RMSL has been located—most appropriately—in a former post office that was built as a railroad station. The building is the old Norfolk & Western depot in Boyce, Va.; built in 1913, it saw four decades of railroad use before becoming the town post office in the 1970's.

Several video programs are available for purchase from the RMSL, including a DVD with two films produced in 1956, *Mail in Motion* and *Men and Mail in Transit*. With a combined running time of 46 minutes, the films are filled with scenes of the men and trains that moved the mail. The DVD sells for $18.99 plus $2.01 first-class postage ($3.01 outside the U.S.) To order one, or learn more about the RMSL, write: Railway Mail Service Library, Inc., 117 E. Main Street, Boyce, VA 22620-9639, or visit www.railwaymailservicelibrary.org.

Dr. Scheer and the RMSL collection were of immeasurable help we prepared this special issue of Classic Trains. Of course, any errors are ours, not his.

More on our Web site
See clips from the Railway Mail Service Library's DVD at www.classictrainsmag.com

RPO's, from the Bing-Bang to the Rabbit

From Aberdeen & Huron ("The Oakes"), on the C&NW, to Zanesville & Parkersburg, on the B&O, almost 700 U.S. RPO's (including 88 Highway Post Offices, 7 boat routes, and 6 electric rail routes) are listed individually in *Mail by Rail*, Long and Dennis's highly engaging history of the Railway Mail Service.

Nicknames, part of the distinctive lingo of RMS men, are listed for almost 300 of the RPO routes. Several routes had more than one monicker, *e.g.*, "The Wooden Axle" and "The Ten Cent," for the Harriman & Nashville RPO on the Tennessee Central.

Many nicknames simply referred to either the railroad (by then-current, historical, or colloquial name), the destination, or an intermediate point (*e.g.*, "The Brook Park," see page 58), but some were quirky, and quite a few were colorful. Here's a sampling, with the official names, railroad(s) over which they operated, and mileage covered:

The Beard & Hair, Beardstown & Herrin (Ill.), CB&Q, 201 miles

The Bing-Bang, Binghamton (N.Y.) & Philadelphia, DL&W-CNJ-RDG, 223

The Can & Bill, Canandaigua (N.Y.) & Williamsport (Pa.), PRR, 144

The Little Windy, Little Rock (Ark.) & Winnfield (La.), CRI&P, 231

The Mexican Zephyr, Denver & Alamosa (Colo.), D&RGW, 274

The Monkey, Savannah (Ga.) & Montgomery (Ala.), SAL, 338

The Monkey Wrench, Pulaski (Va.) & Mt. Airy (N.C.), N&W, 57

The Scissorbill, St. Louis & Memphis, SLSF, 306

The Preacher, St. Louis & Parsons (Kans.), MKT, 387

The Rabbit, Shreveport & Houston, T&NO, 232 miles.

Mail book on the way

Expected in late 2006 from Pixels Publishing (P.O. Box 10, La Fox, IL 60147-0010, www.pixelspublishing.com) is *Moving Mail and Express by Rail*, by Edward M. DeRouin. Ed, an occasional Classic Trains author, tells us his book will be a look into the history, organization, and operation of mail and express business in U.S. railroading. In addition to numerous photos, reproductions of documents including examples of Railway Express Agency car-space reservations and actual train consists will be included. Final page count and retail price have not been set, but we imagine that if you liked our mail-train coverage in

this issue, you'll want to watch for *Moving Mail and Express by Rail.*

A ride on CB&Q 29

In our reprinted David P. Morgan work "Fast Mail" [pages 20-31] about Burlington's fast Chicago-Omaha train, it is stated that train 29's "doors are open to anything that bears postage . . . —that and that alone." Meaning, of course, no passengers carried.

For one night in late February 1962, at least, that wasn't true. The Railroad Club of Chicago, if memory serves, was the sponsor of a special ride on 29 for its entire westbound run. I was beginning college in central Illinois, and I arranged to ride with friend Dick Wallin, of Springfield, up to join the group in Galesburg. The run on 29 was routine, as was the return trip, also overnight on what I believe was train 30, the *Ak-Sar-Ben Zephyr.* Well, not fully routine—the 30 or so of us were accommodated not in any old rider car but in a stainless-steel Budd dome coach!—*Dave Ingles*

An RPO today—really

There's no sorting en route or mail pick-ups on the fly, but since 1990, Pennsylvania tourist pike Oil Creek & Titusville has run what it, and the U.S. Postal Service, call an RPO. There's a real mailbox on an inside wall of the commissary car (a refurbished RPO built for C&O in 1927), and any card or letter mailed in it gets the familiar circular cancellation mark, which reads "OIL CITY, PA OC&T RPO USPS" around the perimeter and contains the date in the center.

Rail-mail miscellany

In 1950, there were nearly 2,600 cars with RPO apartments in the U.S., 600 of which were 60-footers. They operated on 165,000 route-miles, in more than 7,600 trains traveling a total of 165,000 miles per day. . . . The smallest RPO apartment on record measured a mere 7 by 7 feet, on—naturally—one of the Maine two-foot-gauge lines, the Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington, whose Albion & Wiscasset RPO quit in 1933. . . . There were about 200 RPO lines in Canada; the last five ended April 24, 1971. ■

Gordon Parks

New York's Grand Central hosts railroader photo exhibit

A photography exhibition which offers a fresh look at railroad work, "Many Hands: Representations of Railroad Workers," continues through October 29 at Grand Central Terminal in New York City.

The exhibition was developed by the New York Transit Museum and curators John Gruber and Michael Zega of the Center for Railroad Photography & Art. This is the Center's fifth exhibit in its three-year program, "Representations of Railroad Work, Past and Present," funded by the North American Railway Foundation. The location is the transit museum's gallery annex near the Station Master's office.

It takes many hands to run a railroad, the exhibit text explains. Organized chronologically, the 60-plus photographs and numerous artifacts, many from the collection of the museum, reveal much about the various jobs involved in building, maintaining, and running railroads, and the people behind these jobs. The exhibit provides a glimpse of how railroad work has changed over time, as well as how much of it has stayed the same.

This exhibit is a collaboration of the Center (www.railphoto-art.org), a nonprofit arts organization that preserves and presents significant images of railroading, and the Transit Museum (www.mta.info), the largest museum of public transportation history in the U.S.

Focusing on the New York metropolitan region, "Many Hands" features photography legends Hal B. Fullerton, whose 19th century images along the Long Island Rail Road depict a long-forgotten landscape of American-type locomotives and stone-arch viaducts; work portraits by soci'al documentarian Lewis W. Hine taken during the 1920's and '30's; Gordon Parks' intimate views of railroad workers from the 1940's; and recent work by Frank English, who has chronicled Metro-North Railroad for the last 22 years, as well as others whose work has rarely been seen.

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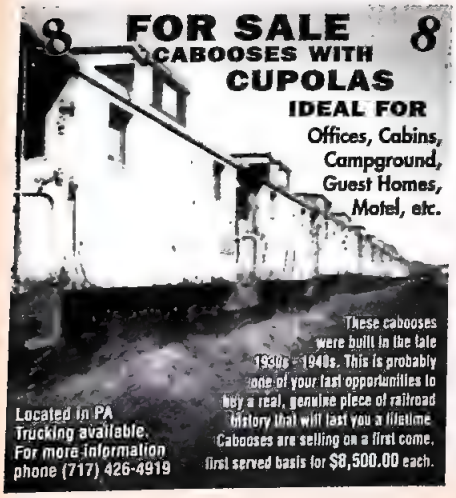
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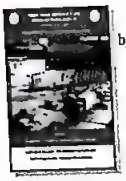
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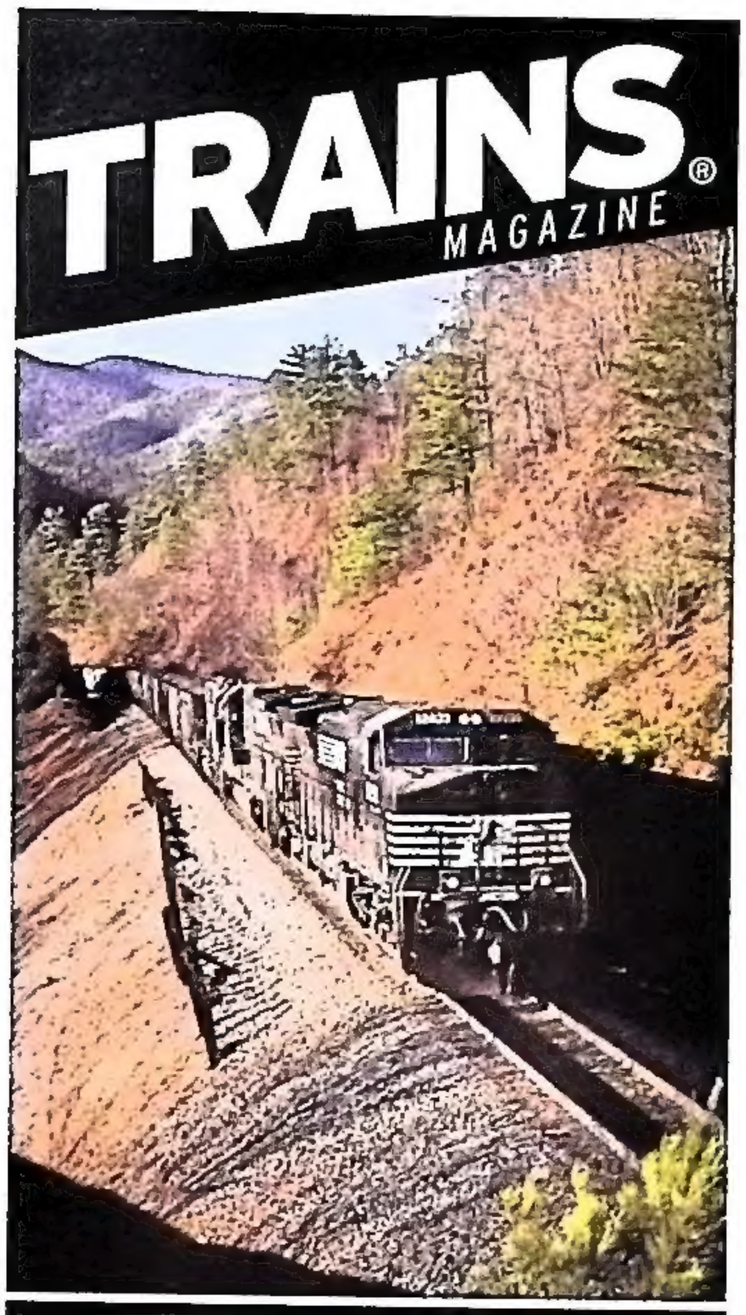

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Big D's long-lived switcher

Down in Dallas, Union Terminal Company 0-6-0 No. 7 jockeys Santa Fe business cars *Atchison* and *Santa Fe* on October 8, 1960—44 years to the day after the station opened in 1916. Though her lines suggest Southern Pacific ancestry, No. 7 was built new for Dallas, by Baldwin in 1923. By crusading for a union station to replace several separate, aging depots, *Dallas Morning News* publisher George Dealey played a major role in the terminal's creation; a nearby plaza bears his name. Jarvis Hunt, architect of Kansas City Union Station, designed Dallas' Beaux Arts-style headhouse (visible above the first business car), which featured a facade of white enameled brick, second-floor waiting rooms, and a concourse over the tracks. A veritable roll call of Southwestern railroads used the terminal: Cotton Belt, Frisco, SP's Texas & New Orleans, Katy, Kansas City Southern's Louisiana & Arkansas (until 1948), Texas & Pacific, Burlington's Fort Worth & Denver, Rock Island, and (after 1948) Santa Fe. By the mid-1960's only Santa Fe, Katy, FW&D, and T&P remained; when T&P's last train left in May 1969, Dallas became the biggest city in the U.S. without rail passenger service. Today, Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* stops here, as do DART light-rail trains and Trinity Railway Express commuter runs. Switcher No. 7 survives as well: Having worked until the late date of May 1961, she retired to Dallas' Age of Steam Museum. ■

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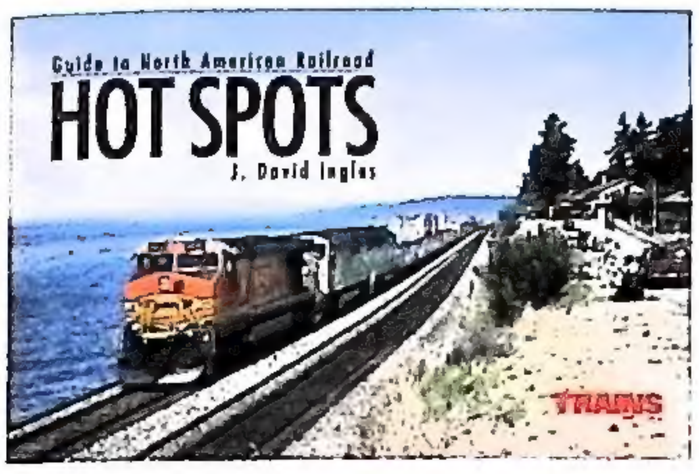

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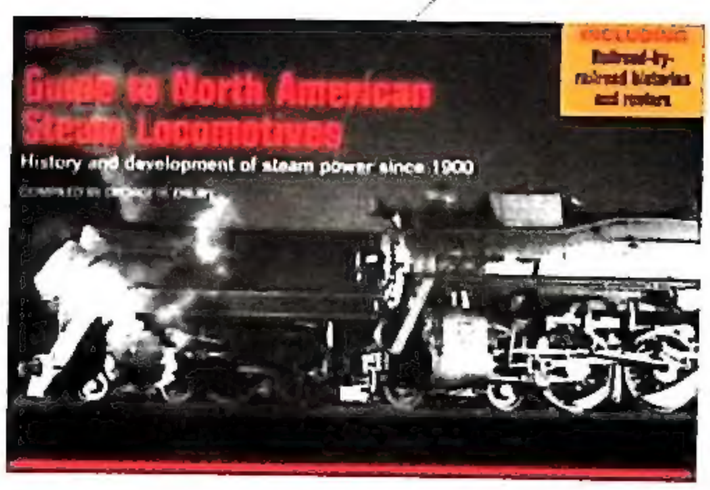

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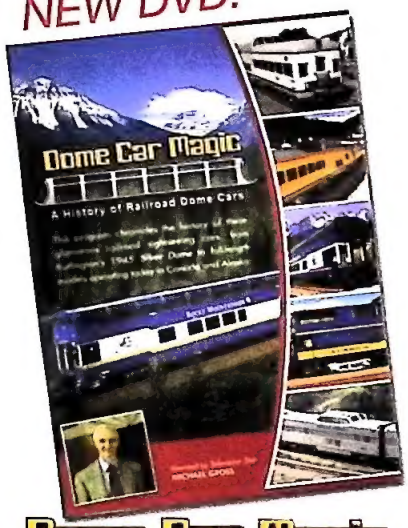

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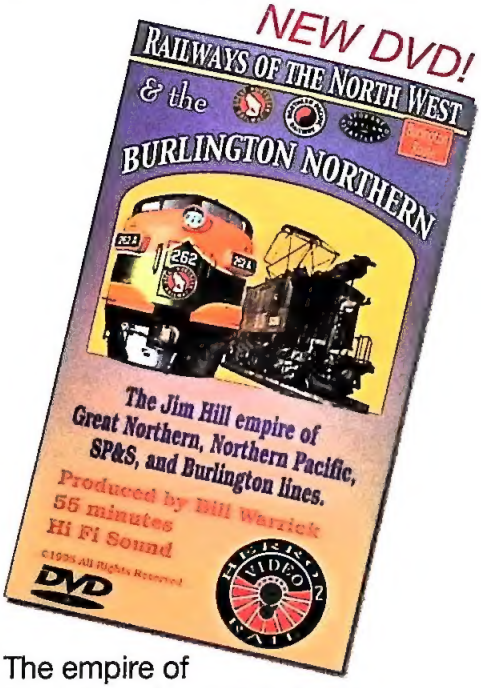

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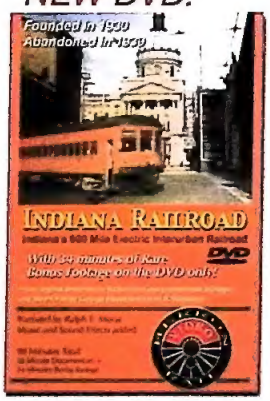

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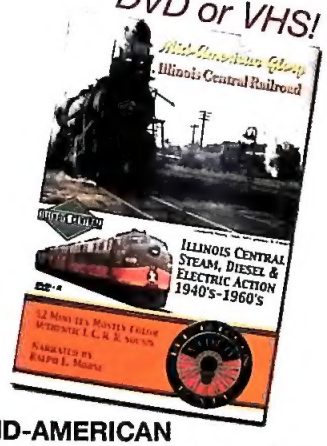

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